Peter Bosten

by John Preston

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PETER BOSTEN

PETER BOSTEN

A Story About Realities

By John Preston

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BY THE AUTHOR

To

WILL AND KATHERINE NICHOLS,

Brooklyn, New York,

I count it a privilege to

Dedicate this book.

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CHAPTER I

KANSAS AND MISSOURI

A TALL, lean figure meandered along one of the side streets of a Missouri town, obviously going nowhere in particular. He had light hair, upon which the early-morning sun now danced, for he was carrying his hat; and large, blue, interrogative eyes, which took in his environment leisurely. The mouth was so formed that one would expect to see it smile a good deal; but just now it was not smiling, for Peter Bosten was somewhat lonesome.

The stillness of Sabbath sat upon the town; particularly this part of it, where the trees were so plentiful. Except for the far-off hum of trolley cars and the occasional toot of a motor, there were no sounds to jar upon the meditations of a reflective stroller.

Peter was thinking of his past; of the quiet years spent upon a Kansas farm and in the store of a village merchant. Was it these he was lonesome for, this morning? No; he decided not. He would not go back to them. Slaving on a farm for a mercenary uncle, who considered it wasting time to read or study, and catering to the customers of a mole-man like Jerry Muntz, his erstwhile merchant employer,

had no particular charms for Peter,—at least, for the Peter of three and twenty years.

Perhaps, then, it was the two years of university life and the few months of business college life upon which he looked back with a sigh? No; Peter thought not. College had been a grind, just as everything else had been in his life. And yet, somewhere in the past, there were voices that called to him; voices of happiness and freedom, love and inspiration.

"The books," he murmured, pressing his lips more firmly together and checking a breath that too closely resembled a sigh.

True, it was the books. They had always been his companions. They had stood him for friends, loves, recreation,—everything. And now they were to be, in part, given up. He was entering into a business office here in Petit City, as stenographer and bookkeeper, and would be obliged to bestow what mental energy he possessed upon his work.

The day's labor would no longer be merely incidental to his living, as it had been on the farm and in the store, where he looked forward to the evening's study as the only serious phase of his daily existence; but would be an end in itself, an unworthy end, and of a nature to necessitate physical recreation: in

other words a waste of time: during the precious hours of evening.

Peter inwardly rebelled against the force of circumstances which impelled him in the direction of business. He saw no sense in joining the money-mob, whose ranks were already overcrowded, and planning a lifelong expenditure of brain and body force for the mere ignoble purpose of attaining physical comforts. In fact, he was rather surprised at himself, this bright, peaceful Sunday morning, for accepting this position in Petit City at all. Why had he not, his savings spent on a college course, gone back to the farm again; to the physical toil that left the mind free, and the faculties eager for study in leisure hours?

Peter repeated the question; and the answer came from a remote corner of his brain: Because there is in your nature a love of adventure, a hunger and a thirst for experiences new. Nor will you stop here. You will go on and on, crying for what is ahead; tasting of new things, and casting them aside when they have lost their flavor. And always it will be with you as it is now: having forsaken the old, and lost a desire for it, you will nevertheless experience odd longings, associated with the past; and by and by your reaching out toward the future will become almost mechanical, void of the joys of anticipation.

For this is your nature, Peter Bosten; and you are better aware of it than any man. Yours is a hungry mind; and this world is a strange place for such. Then at last,—

But here the voice of his spirit became inaudible; and Peter suddenly realized that he had unconsciously selected a shady spot beside a large, vacant lot, and was lying on the grass. He gazed about him listlessly, until his eye caught the glint of a white, stone building through the trees.

"That must be their church," he thought. Then he turned around and surveyed the field of waving grass behind him. "And this must be the Temple Lot. Yes, there's the meetinghouse of the other people; I forget what they call them."

Chiefly because he was lonesome, Peter rose and strolled on toward the stone church. It was early, but he knew that these people had a habit of going to meeting at all times of the day. He recalled, as he walked along, his experiences with them back in Kansas; and shook his head in a serio-comic manner as he thought of the reputation they had for honesty and sincerity.

"You've certainly got to hand it to them," he murmured, unwittingly using the slang of the day.

The Kansan called to mind all the unpleasant things he had heard about them, contrasting this

generous heap of data with his own personal knowledge of them; and smiled at the folly of little minds. His thoughts then drifted to the subject of religion, and to the habits of religionists, in general; and again he shook his head, this time compressing his lips.

He halted at a respectful distance from the stone church, surveying it with interest, and completing, in his imagination, the two unfinished steeples. After speculating on the labor and sacrifice that must have gone into the erection of the structure, he drew nearer and read one of the announcement boards.

The first Sunday service was a young people's prayer meeting. Peter's watch told him that it would now be in progress. Would he go in, or would he continue his lonely walk?

He hesitated. Not in a strait betwixt duty and desire, but rather bashfulness and monotony. It required considerable courage to interrupt a service, a prayer meeting especially. Still, he had yet to receive hostile looks from the members of this denomination, and—

Well, why be so backward? First thing he knew, some one would be suspecting him of Kansas rearing. Peter impulsively took a step forward, determining to exercise his courage now and henceforth at every opportunity.

He almost regretted his bravery, the moment he had set foot in the prayer-room, for a dead silence prevailed there. Some sympathetic soul, however, observing his embarrassment no doubt, started up a hymn; and Peter resolved to find that individual and reward him (it was a bass voice that started the singing), though the quest prove long and uncertain.

The stranger found a seat toward the rear of the room, and sat with eyes and ears alert. He observed and he philosophized. Although it was not more than half-past eight, and an alluring summer's morning, there were many young men and women present—girls of style and evident charm, whom one would have expected to find taking their beauty sleep or setting out on motor excursions. But here they were in this warm, solemn room; singing, praying and standing up to tell of "God's goodness" to them.

Peter had seen a little of this back in the Kansas town; but there it had not impressed him particularly. Village folks were in the habit of getting up early, anyway; and the boys and girls of small places found their chief entertainment in congregating. But here in the city, amid innumerable pleasures, where the stress of the week left one weary on a Sunday morning, this young people's meeting was a phenomenon to him. He admitted to himself that he could not understand it. If the spirit of fanati-

cism had been present he would have explained the meeting according to a formula; but there was no such spirit. Those who spoke, spoke rationally; and the prayers had the ring of sincerity.

Sincerity. It was this fact that gripped the Kansan. He marveled at one or two of the girls, especially. They were not of the commonly-scouted variety of "intellectuals"; that is to say, they were not wedded to the intellectual merely in the absence of more alluring weddings: but girls who knew how to make clothes beautify, yet did not need the tricks of art to render themselves attractive. Obviously they were young women who would be sought after. And here they were, thinking more of the next world than this; more of their fellow creatures than themselves.

In the midst of his reflections Peter was aware of the sound of a familiar voice, and turning toward the speaker he remembered that it was from that direction the first notes of song had come to his relief on entering the place. This, without doubt, was the kind soul who had had compassion upon him in a moment of trial. But the levity of the thought quickly vanished; submerged in the seriousness, the sincerity, of the speaker's tone.

Not until the testimony was done could Peter philosophize. He had been carried along by the deep,

strong current of soul force that accompanied it. He noted the dark complexion and pleasing features, but did not dwell upon them: the vibration of the voice and the significance of the words were so much more vital. They bespoke a soul apart; free from the dross of earth, having access to higher planes of thought and living than the ordinary creature can understand.

The Kansan felt that he, himself, did not understand. The full import of the testimony was lost on him, he knew; but he also knew that the spirit of it, the motive behind it, were factors that his own being could in some degree appraise; and he did not hesitate a moment in forming his judgment of this young man.

"One to be loved and relied on for ever," was his verdict.

Peter decided to breast the tide of fair and unknown faces, the moment the meeting was over, and make his way toward the outstanding individual present. He did so, grimly ashamed of his blushes; and was surprised to see that the one he sought was also seeking him.

They had clasped hands a moment before either spoke, and their eyes were in communication. Peter smiled.

"I want to thank you for starting that hymn. It was you, wasn't it?"

"Yes." The other smiled too, a smile just as genuine as Peter's. "You must have thought it was a Quaker's meeting?"

"No. I know your people, although I am not a member."

"We'll soon fix that," was the quick reply, accompanied by a merry, brief, bass laugh which struck Peter as being distinctly individual. He had never heard one like it before.

"Do I look like a probable convert?" There was no sarcasm in the tone.

"Well, I don't know. You showed great courage in that doorway. I'm half sorry, now, that I helped you out. You would have carried it through just the same."

"It requires courage, then, to become a convert?"

"They say it does. I don't know. I've been in this church all my life, and perhaps am not a competent judge of that. But it seems to me it would take far more courage to face the world without the hope we have, than with it."

Again there was the peculiar element in the voice that impressed Peter. Also, he was struck with the sentiment.

"It's queer," he observed, after a momentary si-

lence in which the two of them were scarcely conscious of their surroundings, "but I seem to have known you before. Away back before store days and farm days—"

Peter broke off, unconsciously. He had spoken more to himself than to his new-found friend.

"Do you believe in the preexistence of the soul?" he asked, suddenly coming out of his distraction.

"Yes, indeed."

As he had done beside the Temple Lot, Peter now discovered himself seated. And another discovery he made, at the same moment: he had forgotten to give his name. With an apologetic grin he met the gaze of his interlocutor.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I'll trade names with you."

The other laughed, in his pleasant bass. "Now isn't that strange," he replied; "but it never occurred to me that we—My name's Crayne, Noel Crayne."

"And mine's Peter Bosten. I'm from Kansas. Going to take a stenographic position with a firm here in Petit City, 'The Gray Electric Company.' I arrived late last night and found a temporary boarding house. Then, being unable to sleep this morning, I got up and went for a walk, which took me in this direction. I dropped in because I had nothing else to do, and was sort of—sort of lonesome."

"You're coming with me for dinner," said Noel, conclusively.

Before the Kansan could dispute this arrangement (he had no intention of so doing), Crayne went on to say that he reciprocated his new friend's impressions regarding a former acquaintance, sometime, somewhere; but was interrupted by a male voice from the rear.

"Hello there, Allan," said Noel, turning round. "Meet Mr. Bosten, Mr. Leader."

Peter was unfavorably impressed, at first, with the intruder. He was a lad of perhaps twenty, with piercing eyes, an aquiline nose, high cheek bones and a fighting chin. Instantly Peter detected himself engaging in an imaginary but sanguinary combat with this dangerous-looking young fellow. However, when Leader spoke, although his tones were anything but musical, Peter felt an impulsive wave of sympathy for him.

"Noel," he said, regardless of the presence of a stranger who had been introduced as "Mr." rather than "Brother," "I came over to tell you how much good your testimony did me this morning."

The speaker's voice began to shake, and tears stole into his eyes. Peter marveled at these phenomena. They were so contradictory to the features and personality of Leader. But he was speaking on.

"It was a fight for me to come here, I can tell you. The very powers of evil seemed drawing me—well, you know where. Noel, I want you to pray for me. I believe God listens to a man like you."

These words were spoken in a tone of conviction. Peter could not but realize that the speaker was sincere; and a familiar question confronted him. Why could not *he* thus believe in God's intervention in human affairs? Or, rather, why *did* he not? Why did not the necessity of it appeal to him?

When the Kansan came out of his meditation he realized that Leader had gone and Crayne was conversing with two girls. Instinctively he moved away; but Noel caught his sleeve and drew him closer to the delectable danger.

Then Peter was introduced to Jessie Kirkton and Adele Cressy. He remembered hearing Miss Kirkton speak in the meeting, but not Miss Cressy. As a matter of fact, the latter had not spoken.

The contrast between Allan Leader and Noel Crayne, thought the visitor, was not more marked than that between these two girls. One was quiet, extremely modest, thoughtful of countenance, and possessed a beauty seemingly independent of the physical; the other was pretty, proud and apparently superficial. That both of them liked Crayne was at once apparent to the observant Kansan.

Miss Kirkton mentioned how she had enjoyed the meeting, and at the remark Miss Cressy glanced at the stranger rather apologetically and smiled an enigmatic smile. A faint flush touched the cheeks of the former, at this (and Miss Cressy, Peter was convinced, not himself, had provoked it) ; which caused Noel to produce those musical, guttural sounds of his, and observe:

"This fellow isn't a brother yet, but see how young he is."

Peter laughed, and assured them that all the same he had enjoyed the prayer service too.

Suddenly Miss Kirkton asked him if he sang; he hesitated—and all was lost. A moment later another Miss Kirkton had been summoned, to whom he was introduced and turned over with such expedition that he felt a trifle dizzy. Before he fully comprehended what was being done, he found himself pledged to help in the choir.

Peter's face assumed such a comical expression of despair, when he realized he had committed himself, that Bertha Kirkton, Jessie's sister, felt constrained to fortify him against the ordeal. She told him that Crayne would be close beside him and—

But this was enough. Peter's face lighted up right away, and he agreed to do his best. Noel's eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"Say, Jessie," he said, "if you'll take my class this morning I think I'll skip Sunday school. I've a good reason."

He whispered something in her ear, and the pact was arranged.

A few minutes later Peter found himself on the way to his boarding house, in company with Noel, who had formed some sort of resolution, the substance of which was not quite apparent to the Kansan.

When Peter was commanded to pack his suit case and leave instructions for a trunk to be sent to 1441 Walton Street, the fullness of Noel's perfidy finally swept down upon him.

"Now come on, please," coaxed the Missourian, his companion having shown signs of balking, "even if it's only for a day or two. We have three big empty rooms, and mother and I are lonesome. Say, if you only knew how my mammy can cook, you'd—"

Noel halted, and they laughed in each other's faces. It was all so jolly to Peter, who had never known such full and spontaneous friendship as this; and an adventure, too, so much after Noel's own heart. There was nothing to do but pull together, they decided, finally: which, the Kansan discovered, in this case meant pulling in Noel's direction: so

they each took a strap of Peter's suit case and walked up the middle of the street with it.

Was this the same Crayne who had commanded the attention of a hundred young men and women so solemnly an hour ago? Peter glanced at him interrogatively, bewilderedly, and wondered when the awakening from this dream would come.

But it did not come. Instead, the dream progressed in its fairy-like course, bringing the Kansan in touch with another desirable character,—Mrs. Crayne.

She received her son and the visitor literally with open arms. It was a hospitable movement characteristic of her. And Peter noticed that her eyes were the same shape as Noel's, large and rather oblique, and had a way, like his, of glistening with pleasure.

There were no whispered consultations behind doors, or other evidences of enforced welcome. Noel merely said that he had brought their home a pleasant surprise, as though the visitor were a Christmas present. This made an end of the matter.

Peter was shown to the cleanest bedroom he had ever seen, and told that this was his. He might have been a dear relative. Here, he reflected, hospitality was complete.

Peter was asked, upon descending to the living room, whether he would prefer to attend church at

eleven o'clock or stay home and visit with Mrs. Crayne. A fearful vision of himself in the choir persuaded him to make the easy choice, but immediately he changed his mind, for it occurred to him that he would be keeping Noel's mother home from the service. He was glad he had made the sacrifice when he saw the pleased expression on her face and her son's.

Were they trying to convert him? he asked himself, with a secret smile. If so, he would be obliged to yield, out of very appreciation of their kindness. But he could not, and did not, really charge them with any such intentions. They had favored him out of the goodness of their hearts, and he loved them for it. That he differed now and might for ever differ from them on matters of theology was irrelevant to this wonderful friendship, so suddenly and sincerely begun.

Mrs. Crayne asked the boys not to wait for her, as she would be late. Besides, Noel had to arrive ten minutes early to arrange the anthems.

The mention of the word *anthem* almost overbalanced the Kansan's still wavering courage; but he was buoyed up by the tactful Noel with many logical assurances.

On the way to the church Peter found occasion to

inquire about Allan Leader, who was still on his mind.

"You would hardly believe," Noel replied, as though speaking to an old-time confidant, "what that fellow's been through. He began life in good surroundings: his father is one of our best men and preachers: but he drifted into the very purple of iniquity, and it's only of late he has tried to lift himself out of it."

Peter appreciated this confidence more than he could say. Noel's utter disregard for appearances; his superiority, for instance, to such a qualification as would have kept Allan's father out of mention; struck the Kansan as an admirable example of honesty and fearlessness of dishonesty. Here was a character with whom one could be unreservedly truthful, for he was so himself.

They talked awhile about Leader, Noel expressing the hope that good influences would succeed in permanently winning him back from a life of folly.

"Why do you say 'good influences,' rather than God?" Peter asked, not with any desire to be clever.

Noel took the question seriously; seemed glad, in fact, that it had been propounded.

"Because I like to feel that man has a lot to do with his own salvation—and that of his fellows. Our

church, Mr. Bosten, does not preach the saved-by-grace doctrine. We lay emphasis on works."

The Kansan's large, interrogative eyes widened in appreciation.

"That," he returned, "is the most sensible piece of theology I've yet heard."

The argument, if argument it could be called, would doubtless have gone further, had not the church been at hand. They entered a side door leading into the basement, and there the choir had already gathered.

Noel was soon the center of interest, a fact that Peter did not marvel at. The girls especially had a way of drifting toward him, that reminded the Kansan of analogies in nature too numerous to mention. But Noel was more bent on introducing his new friend and making him feel at home, than on answering irrelevant questions and returning pretty greetings.

On one girl, however, the Missourian did attend, the moment he saw her approaching. It was Jessie Kirkton, and she had some one at her heels.

The some one was Helen Dyke.

A singular thing happened to Peter when he took the hand Helen offered. He who did not believe in visions, saw one. Green fields, and the play of sunlight on water. High-floating clouds, and—

But the vision mysteriously disappeared, for a very natural reason. He had been seeing it in great, dark eyes, over which the lids now suddenly and bashfully fell.

The Kansan had an uncomfortable feeling that he ought to apologize. But he could not frame suitable phrases. So he looked at the toe of his shoe.

CHAPTER II

RELIGION AND LOVE

THE two friends were sitting on the front-veranda, digesting one of Mrs. Crayne's notable dinners. At the solicitation of both Noel and his mother, Peter had taken up his abode with them as a boarder. But never, in the history of boarding houses, had there been one like this.

Peter was in a retrospective mood, and while he was loath to interrupt the sketch, whatever it was, that Noel was making in pencil, on a bit of paper, he could not refrain from indulging in pleasant reminiscences. Several months had passed since his coming to Petit City; but the fairy tale was still being spun, and seemed likely to continue. There had been no breaks in the fabric of it. Peter had been exceedingly happy.

Of course, there had been religious discussions to no end, and, Peter hoped, these would continue. For they were not of the kind that end in personalities, misunderstanding and ill-feeling; but arguments involving only ideas and a sincere desire for the elucidation of truth.

One circumstance puzzled the Kansan, in spite of his high regard for the mental liberality of these his

friends: the entire absence of fear on Mrs. Crayne's part that he (Peter) would alienate Noel's mind from his faith. This assurance, he was compelled to admit, was not mere egotism; for the Craynes were anything but egotists. Their very creed necessitated the obliteration of the ego, or, rather, the submerging of it in the will of the divine.

Theological queries, however, were in the back of his mind this noon hour. Immediately in his thoughts were the incidents and coincidences that had marked his coming to the Craynes' and his sojourn with them.

"Noel," he remarked, "as you sit there making a sketch of your Jessie——"

"Don't flatter yourself," Noel interrupted, with a grin, "that this series of lines here portrays the beauty you have mentioned."

Whereat the sketch was flashed in Peter's face, and he saw a likeness not of Jessie Kirkton but of himself. And the artist gave vent to his odd bass laugh, which made Peter think of a different musical instrument each time it was sounded. Now he associated it with a rapid cadenza on a bass viol.

"I apologize to Jessie," said the Kansan, taking the sketch and admiring it, in spite of the fact that it was his own profile. "But I was going to say: As you sit there amusing yourself with pencil and paper,

I can scarcely identify you with the Noel Crayne I met that Sunday morning in the church basement."

"How is that?"

"Well, I hardly know. You seemed to me like a being from Mars or some other planet above the earth, then. Now you are merely a man, like myself, —eh?"

The "eh" interpreted the remark for Noel. He knew that his friend was simply drawing him out, as usual, in order to make a point of his, Noel's, supposed superiority.

"Peter," he returned, "you may not believe it, but let me tell you that often I envy you and your ways. I can not conceive of myself facing the universe with a question, as you seem to do, and of still retaining my grip upon myself, upon morality and high ideals. I depend upon my faith in God and a hereafter to keep me up; yes, I know I do."

The Kansan looked at his watch, not like one who would gladly escape present company, but as though he regretted the passage of time.

"I'm renting that little Ford again this afternoon," he said, grinning. "Promised to call at a certain address about three o'clock. So don't let us get down so deep, Noel, that we can not extricate ourselves in time for my engagement."

Their voices blended in a chuckle, for well they knew their failings.

"I wouldn't have you miss the appointment for worlds," observed Noel. "And I'm not only thinking of you, either."

"Ah, go on, you—sentimentalist!—But anyway, I'm thinking it would take considerable to make me forget my pleasure to that extent. Noel, now seriously, why should I take such entire leave of my reason as to keep doing this thing when I know it will all end in disappointment——?"

"Peter!" came the admonition, "you mustn't keep thinking of disastrous consequences all the time like this. Do you know what you are? You're a fatalist; a fatalist in love as in religion. What you need is a little faith."

It always happened like this. No matter what subject they discussed, they came back, automatically, to religion; to the spiritual laws affecting man's life on earth and beyond.

The Kansan was silent a moment. However widely he differed from Noel in theory, the Missourian put such sweeping earnestness into his assertions that under its influence Peter frequently became aware of the staggering of logic. It was a strange feeling, capable of involving the derangement of the entire universe, he conceived, if carried

beyond certain bounds. What those bounds were he could not determine, any more than he could determine the nature of this influence that radiated from Noel Crayne.

"If I need faith," he asked, throwing off the weight of his subconscious reflections, "why do you say that sometimes you envy me? Am I not to be pitied if your faith be true and I can not grasp it?"

Noel's eyes sparkled, as they always did on these occasions.

"An ignorant man might pity you, Peter, but a thinking man never could. The reason for this is that you are, beyond doubt, sincere. Only the insincere are, or ought to be, the objects of pity. You are a most peculiar case; the hardest, in fact, that I have ever met. There is no way of getting at you, it seems. One must reason with you on an abstract basis; and you are so intensely logical that you would drive most men mad in an argument. But you never take unfair advantage of a controversialist, and you do not often resort to sophistry. Therefore I admire your—your intellect. But this envy of mine concerns your soul, rather than your brain—if we can make a distinction between the two. You live independently of your fellows; you do not, you say, believe in any of our religions; you can not comprehend a God: and yet, in spite of all this, you love

your fellow men, you devote yourself to good works, believe in the immortality of the soul, and—and argue without losing your ballast!"

Peter made a smiling comment on his friend's oratory, but sobered down instantly as he concentrated on one of Noel's statements.

"You say that you know you could not 'keep up' without this faith of yours, Noel. Now, I believe that you could. You and men like you, of which, thank goodness, there are a few in the world, are what you are because of the centuries, the eons, the influences that lay behind you. Not because of your belief in a God, but in spite of it. You could surrender this belief, and still crave what is noble and good and true——"

"But," came the interruption, "without the Scriptures, which we cherish, where would we find standards of goodness and truth? What would we be guided by?"

Peter smiled.

"There we come to the dividing line, as usual," he said. "You always seem to forget that you are talking to an agnostic instead of a religionist."

"So I do," agreed Noel. "You maintain that the Bible and everything else in this world, except Nature, is the work of man."

"Yes. Man made religion what it is: religion did

not make man what *he* is. He came to his present status by fighting the fight of the universe, which has been unswervingly onward and upward, through the slime and morass, in blood and sweat. He has set up standards for himself all along the way; and these have become nobler, as he has became nobler. If he desires to create a god, if that god be as noble as yours, I say let him go on creating. But I must reserve the right, as a rational being, to follow my own standards. And whether they are as lofty as yours or not can only be determined by our actions. Does not this faith of yours, let me ask you, in the final analysis mean works? And how are these works judged? By faith in the divine, or by the human faculty we call *reason*? Will you answer me that, Noel?"

"Peter, I'm not sure that I quite follow you. Yes, wait a minute. Here again we come to the abstract. You place reason anterior to faith; I put faith before reason. It is a matter not of logic but of choice, of spiritual inclination."

"No, I think you are wrong, Noel." Peter was warming up. "You believe in God and your gospel, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you do so out of choice? Is it a mere whim?

Or do you do so because you believe it to be right?"

"Because I believe it to be right, of course."

"Then you have a reason for your faith: a 'reason for the hope that is within you,' as your splendid orator, Mr. Leader, said this morning in his sermon. Why, it is this disposition on your part and on the part of your preachers that warms me to you. Every earnest member of your church seems not only willing but anxious to give a reason for his belief. Is that not so?"

"It is," replied Noel, unequivocally.

"Then," Peter returned quickly, "is not reason anterior to faith?"

Noel considered the question well before replying.

"Peter," he said, at length, "I feel that there is an answer somewhere, but I can not command it. We will call this a point in your favor, for the time being. Let us go back to your theory of evolution. Tell me, in what way is a true interpretation of this doctrine in conflict with the idea of God? How does it account for Nature?"

"I don't say it *is* thus in conflict. But I do say that it is opposed to the *common conception* of God. There may be a Divine Being. I can not comprehend him, but he may exist for all that. But if so, he is infinitely above the God of the ancient Israelites, who, I believe, are responsible for that beauti-

ful, poetical and fanciful work the Bible; yes, and above the modern Christian's conception, too. He is a being in harmony with the greatness of this universe, the workings of which the human family is just beginning to vaguely understand. Even you, Noel, make him an interested spectator in the petty concerns of our infinitesimal individual existences. To me this is inconceivable. To you it seems to be conceivable. And there we are—at the dividing line again. But my point is this: that my belief is more reasonable than yours, and therefore more desirable. I concern myself with this world alone, cherishing no illusions, but doing my poor best. You do your best, but you have illusions and they hamper you. Without them you would be even a nobler and stronger character than you are."

The Missourian spoke after a thoughtful pause.

"You forgot to answer my question about evolution and Nature. What does your belief do with the grass of the fields? And, for that matter, with all life? With birth and with death?"

"Leaves them alone, as incomprehensibles," replied the Kansan. "Religionists go building theories around them. I can not accept these speculations; to me they are mere human vagaries. I can not, for instance, believe in the garden of Eden story, or the story of Creation. Judged in the light of all

the knowledge I possess, they are unreasonable, impossible. Nor can I see any possible advantage in *trying* to believe them. Observation has convinced me that men and women may go through this world leading clean, admirable, useful lives without believing in them. Here you will say that our lives may be admirable on the surface but if we do not have the 'love of God' in our hearts we are empty shells. This, I beg to say, is a supposition, and I have no room in my creed for suppositions. My beliefs, whatever they are, rest upon knowledge and reason. But you have no right, Noel, to ask me to explain what neither I nor yourself really understand. If I followed the same line of argument I would ask you to work a miracle, since you believe in miracles."

Noel put his hand on his friend's knee.

"Peter," he smiled, "you are too keen for me—too clever."

"No, it's not that, old boy. It's the logic. Honest men like you can not stem it. I don't deserve a bit of the credit myself."

"And yet," Noel returned, "I am not convinced. I still believe that my view is right; that there is a God in heaven who guides us——"

"I have not denied God," Peter interrupted.

"My God, you have; the Father of the human family and of past and present revelation. If you

have a god, Peter, he is different from mine; different from the only true and living God."

Peter shook his head, rather sadly.

"There you go again with your assumptions," he said, as near to impatience as he ever got with the Missourian.

"I beg your pardon," Noel apologized: "and now I may continue in my assumption! I still have my faith whole, Peter. Moreover, I go so far as to predict that some day you will see as I do—because you are honest. There is a passage in the Scriptures I love, which says: 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.' If you would only pray earnestly, Peter, this faith, this conviction, of mine and my brothers would come to you. I know it would."

Out of respect for the sincerity of these sentiments rather than the sentiments themselves, Peter forbore to reply. He was afraid of wounding so fine a spirit as Noel's by delving too deeply with his human weapons. Moreover, he was restrained again by the subtle influence that often accompanied such whole-hearted declarations of Noel's.

He did not tell his friend, at this time, of the night he had kneeled to pray for the wisdom promised and broken into a spell of weeping so violent its effects

remained with him for days; nor did he recount his consequent reflections: By going contrary to reason and appealing to a god in whom he could not believe, he had deliberately upset the psychologic arrangement of his mind, a mind intrinsically rational, and induced a common phenomenon—a disturbance of the emotions. He had seen the same thing happen in others, of various creeds and degrees of intellectuality. Some individuals, even whole congregations, so far surrendered themselves, against reason, to the domination of fancy that they became temporarily insane. Under such conditions Peter had witnessed what were called certain "gifts of the gospel," of the validity of which and the reason for which he could not conceive.

His crying spell, upon the night of his attempt to pray, had resulted in a resolution to tamper no more with the unknown. But he did not tell Noel of this resolution, to-day. He might do so, he thought, at some future time.

Notwithstanding he was about to enter upon the great weekly adventure: his Sunday afternoon meeting with Helen Dyke: the Kansan reluctantly tore himself away from Noel. Their friendship was a source of constant wonder to him. Like tastes and temperaments did not seem to fully explain it. Neither did contrary religious views. Peter felt

that it was, perhaps, a biological affinitization, more nearly explainable from the evolutionist's viewpoint than any other; but even then it was, like miracles, not susceptible of complete analysis.

"Noel is thankful to his god for faith. Let me be thankful to my God for this friendship."

Peter thus soliloquized as he walked toward the garage where his Ford awaited him.

The little machine was in good condition, and he had learned to operate it safely. As he sailed down Grandview Avenue, in the direction of a well-known bungalow, he could not but feel that, with all its gloom and mystery, life was worth while. And, with these emotions that played around the heart at thought of a woman, he concluded that life in any age, however primeval, must be a joy.

This reflection gave birth to others, chief among which was a query concerning the thing called happiness. Did not the savage, the eater of raw meat and the slayer of his fellows, feel thrills very similar to those that he, Peter Bosten, now experienced, in thinking of a loved one and anticipating a meeting? Undoubtedly. Then to what extent were such joy-pangs the product of mind? How about the beast of the field? Did not he, also, know something of physical affection? Nay, more; did he not choose, with unerring instinct, a favorite from the herd?

Few of the pedestrians on Grandview Avenue who saw a well-dressed young gentleman speeding in a motor car would have even remotely associated him with such ponderous cogitations, perhaps; but nevertheless, Peter wrestled with thought as he sped along. And through and behind his musings echoed phrases and sentences of Noel's.

After all, might not he, Peter, be the fool and Noel the wise man? Who could tell?

Peter sighed.

Did Noel Crayne, after all, really know what he claimed to know? Had he the assurance of truth, which, according to Mr. Leader's sermon to-day, went with the right kind of faith? If so, why was not this faith, this comforter, vouchsafed to every earnest inquirer? Why did not he, Peter Bosten, possess it? Surely a kind, loving, all-wise God could not be offended at him for refraining from a prayer that led to hysterics?

"Is there something the matter with my brain?" Peter wondered. "Is faith a biological impossibility with me? Am I centuries, eons, behind Noel Crayne in the scale of life? Do I lack the 'spiritual faculty' of which religionists make so much capital?"

With untiring mental vigor he kept up the discussion in his brain until a familiar figure waved to

him from the veranda of a bungalow, and signaled that she would be out immediately.

The sight of her set his mind at rest; and when she came near and he felt her happy, glorious presence, he congratulated the universe on its work. Whoever the Creator was, the created was a thing of beauty for ever; made to impart life and happiness. Peter did not know whence she came. Indeed, he did not care to know, while with her. This feminine being was the arc that had long been missing from his circle: now the circle was complete. What did reasonings and abstractions matter? Here was something concrete, undeniably good, unquestionably necessary, infinitely desirable.

"Peter," she said, in the very voice one would have expected to accompany those vivacious features, "you look at me but you don't say anything."

He reached for the brake-lever, but somehow or other his hand went astray; and returning her gaze, this time without the "blank look," of which she often complained, he exclaimed:

"I was thinking of you so hard, Helen, that I forgot to speak. What shall I say,—something about the weather? By the way, do you want to run this jitney?"

"No, no, you do. When I drive, you go away off

into space and overlook me entirely. The wheel seems to help me keep you down to earth."

"That's where I want to be," he returned, gallantly, "when you're here."

She tossed her head a little, to make it appear that she did not like such sentiments; but Peter felt no pangs of remorse over what he had said: which goes to show what strides he was making in some of the gentler arts.

They talked little as the machine bore them swiftly along. By and by, they knew, a shady rural spot would come into view; and there they would rest, as was their custom.

As they turned eastward from Grandview Avenue they passed two strollers who waved at them.

"Who were they?" asked Peter, looking back over his shoulder.

"Allan Leader," replied Helen, "and Adele Cressy."

"Adele Cressy!"

"Yes,—why? You seem surprised."

"So I am. I didn't think she would ever be attracted to a fellow like Allan."

"Do you think she is any better than he is, Peter?"

"Better? No, certainly not. I was thinking of the superficial aspect of it. She is a girl of peculiar

charm. Allan is a rough-and-ready sort. She is fastidious; he is not."

Helen smiled.

"You seem to forget that a girl sometimes does a thing without any particular reason. This is probably a whim of Adele's. You are always looking for the wherefore, aren't you?"

He admitted that he was.

"Even a whim, Helen, may be explained. It is an effect, not a cause."

"Look out, Mr. Metaphysician!" she cried, laying a hand on his arm. "Don't you see the mud puddle ahead?"

They barely escaped a splashing, but Peter seemed unconcerned.

"Do you know, Helen," he went on, as though there had been no interruption, "I am somehow interested in those two people we passed. They are rather unique characters. I was more than surprised to hear Miss Cressy bear her testimony this morning. She seemed very much in earnest. Do you suppose it's her respect for Leader's efforts to do right that attracted her to him to-day?"

For some reason Helen did not reply. Presently Peter gave her a puzzled, comical look, but saw only a roguish expression in her eyes. It was not until

they had stopped the car and were reclining in the shade that she answered his question.

"If you promise to dismiss Adele and Allan," she observed, cautiously, "I'll tell you something."

He eagerly agreed, and was all attention.

"I'm thinking, Peter, that she is trying to show a certain young and interesting man that other young men may also have their charms."

The Kansan whistled.

"Girls are peculiar pieces of machinery. I'm wondering who the other party is, Helen."

"Are you sure you don't know?"

"Certain."

"Then maybe I shouldn't tell you. He will do so himself—you know him even better than I do, although I have known him longer than you."

Peter's eyes widened.

"Noel!" he exclaimed.

Helen nodded. "Yes, and if you promise to keep the secret I'll tell you something else. Adele's regard for Noel is not entirely unreciprocated." (Peter grinned at the long word, but she did not observe it.) "If it were not for Jessie—"

She did not finish; probably because aware that she had plunged her companion into reverie. He seemed not to notice that she had broken off the sentence.

By and by, though, a question of hers gained the attention of all his faculties.

"Peter," she asked, her lids falling, "when are you going to be baptized?"

CHAPTER III

KINDRED SPIRITS

BUSINESS transactions in Petit City, Peter found, were conducted precisely as they were elsewhere. Everybody was trying to make a profit out of somebody else; some honestly, others dishonestly. There were members of Noel's church in this town who did not scruple to employ tricks and falsehood in their quest of the dollar; but Peter did not hold the actions of such against the church and its teachings. He knew there were good and bad in all denominations. Some men and women would disgrace almost any creed.

Nevertheless, he wondered that the members of this particular church, with its lofty ideals and consistent principles, did not, as a mass, come nearer to the measure of such men as Noel Crayne. When they professed a belief in the Bible and God, why did they not make good their profession? In their own eyes they were better than outsiders, "the world." Should not their superiority be more clearly perceptible to a disinterested spectator like himself?

Occasionally Peter caught himself wishing that the followers of "Noel's church" would live better lives. He marveled, somewhat, at the wish. What

did it matter to him? Why should he feel any more sympathy for one sect than another?

His mind reverted to the first young folks' prayer meeting he had attended. Again he heard the earnest prayers and testimonies of youths and maidens. Their voices thrilled him, as they had done that bright Sunday morning. Why was this?

Always the same answer came to him: Sincerity. These people were honestly trying to pattern their lives after the life of the man Christ. There was no denying the fact. And, Peter was convinced, they were trying harder than any denomination he had ever known.

Of course, he did not attribute their sincerity to their faith. He believed they were what they were because of the mind-and-matter influences that lay behind them, far back in the past; and that they could surrender their creed without spiritual loss. But how should he explain the phenomenon of such universal sincerity, which existed regardless, it seemed, of mental status? Thus he answered himself: The influence of strong, noble minds upon weaker ones.

The dishonest, half-striving members here in Petit City were weak. Their sincerity was not of the highest quality, perhaps, but it corresponded with the

measure of their manhood and womanhood. These were helped along by the stronger characters.

Here, Peter reflected, was the great argument for congregating. Nor had he ever heard of a church laying such stress upon material and spiritual cooperation as this one. Petit City itself was a concrete example. They called it and the surrounding country a sacred spot. They believed the time would come when they should have a splendid temple on the Temple Lot. They came from the ends of the earth to this corner of Missouri, because of their faith in the advantages of cooperation. They were not like many other such communities, however. They retained their individual rights and possessions, and their interest in their less fortunate brothers was purely voluntary. They believed in human free agency, under the direction of "God's Spirit," as they termed the guiding influence; and used their reasoning faculties more than any other religionists Peter had known. Of course, as he viewed it, they were greatly hampered by their illusions concerning something of which they really *knew* nothing; but not so much as other sects. And they had the advantage of being consistent, in their belief, with the teachings of the Bible; believing not in a modern God, "without body, parts or passions," but in the

living God of the Hebrews, and in Christ as the living flesh-and-blood Son of God.

The Kansan enjoyed life in Petit City because of the very influence exercised by these two or more thousand members of Noel's church. Like himself they were idealists. He had a fellow feeling for them. Had it not been for the intellectual interest he took in their affairs, their dreams and sweet illusions, he believed he would never have remained in the city.

But stay,—there was Helen. Yet, was not she, too, one of Noel's sisters? Moreover, might not his interest in her be, in some measure, associated with his regard for Noel and the church? Peter could not be sure. Of one thing he was sure, though: he loved her and would gladly give up bookkeeping to engage in heaving coal,—should anyone demonstrate that coal-heavers found themselves in a position to marry at twenty-four.

Work in the office was irksome to the Kansan. He likened himself to an ant crawling around a dusty floor; a thing of infinitesimal consequence. What earthly sense was there in keeping accounts and typewriting letters? From the employer's view, perhaps, it was rational. It was money the employer was after, and in order to get it he must keep books and send out accounts. But from the standpoint of

the bookkeeper, what was there to it? The employee was after what?

"Success," society answered.

"And what is success?"

"A home, a wife, a family and an income."

"But," objects Peter, "I fail to see where twelve dollars per week brings these fairy-like possessions any nearer to me. Consider what I give up for this salary? I surrender ten hours of the day, the strain of which obliges me to waste my evenings in physical recreation. I give up my old friends, the books, and backslide intellectually and every other way as inevitably as the hands of the clock move forward."

Society could not reply to this statement of fact with anything resembling logic. But still Peter did not quit his position. He crushed down his ambition because of his love. It was the old story of Cupid's domination. To move away from Petit City would be to separate himself from Helen—and Noel. He could endure to think of leaving the latter, much as he loved him; but not the former.

As he walked in the direction of Bishop Garner's office now, on a business errand for his firm, the Kansan discussed his situation for the second time this morning. In his heart he knew that he could never become vitally interested in business. Its smallness and its trickery nauseated him. In the

business environment he breathed dust instead of Nature's free air, and looked through a sickly haze of money-mist upon a twisted world. There was no sunshine; there were no wings. One walked about with leaden feet and heavy eyes, gazing stupidly upon the earth instead of into the heavens.

Peter felt in his soul that one day he would revolt, and then there would be no going back. It was this conviction, no doubt, that made him feel uncertain of Helen's love.

He might continue to look about him for a better place, he mused. Some one might happen to die and leave a desirable vacancy somewhere. Fate might just favor him in some such manner. But even then, what would the outcome be? Could he be happy, could he fulfill his mission on earth, (Peter had always felt that he existed for some definite purpose: a nobler one, too, than would satisfy most of his fellows); could he give back to Helen what he had taken from her—with the constant burden of a soul-crushing vocation upon him? While groveling in the dust of business could he soar with her o'er the upper planes? Or would he not daily see her spirit wilt, with his own, cramped and suffocated by a sordid environment, as he had known it to happen to many idealists?

Peter knew he was what practical ones called a

"dreamer," and that what satisfied the majority of men would never satisfy him. Nor did he consider it sensible to ignore this fact. He was not in the habit of ignoring facts. The only way to deal with them was to face them. He knew, too, that Helen Dyke was a dreamer. Her mind dwelt above the dust. Then why deceive himself into hoping that they could ever find happiness and usefulness together in the ordinary channels of living?

Another thing made him uncertain as to the outcome of his love. Their difference of faith. He recalled the beginning of their arguments—her asking him, several months before, when he intended to be baptized. He could not forget the look of disappointment that had come over her face when he explained his views. A coldness had crept between them; and yet he could scarcely call it that. It was a psychological barrier, but one that sometimes broke down, for a while, under the impact of natural passion-bursts. But each time Helen had recovered herself: instead of weakening her position these reactions seemed to strengthen it.

There was a group of men, "missionaries" Peter knew them to be, standing in front of the bishop's office. It was within a few days of General Conference—a convention that had prevailed in the church for half a century. Preachers and delegates

came from Britain, Canada, Australia, Germany, all parts of America and even the South Seas to attend this conference.

Peter's business necessitated a personal interview with Bishop Garner; and for the first time he had the pleasure of appraising the bishop's personality.

He was a man of simple, quiet speech, and kindly mien. One felt at home in his presence. He did not swell and expostulate, as the Kansan had feared bishops might do; but talked to the point, even injecting a joke; and ended, as his habit was, with a sincere good wish.

The office was half filled with preachers; strong-faced men mostly. It was evident that this annual meeting was the joy of their lives. For months, perhaps years, they carried their gospel into distant places, struggling against prejudice and poverty, looking forward firstly to heaven and secondly to General Conference. And when they got together they reveled in intellectual and social joys.

Peter half envied them. Certainly he respected them. They were idealists all; but idealists who would not countenance defeat. The last thing in the world they thought of was money: Money, the thing for which the majority of men damned themselves and each other. They believed in certain principles, and these principles they preached, in highways and

byways, in suffering and sacrifice. Naught really mattered to them but their gospel and the salvation of the human family.

Peter went back to his office disgusted with himself. Whether these missionaries were right or wrong, they were stronger men than he. They did not compromise with selfishness and pleasure. They left their homes and loved ones to obey the message of their Christ: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Peter temporarily forgot his own affairs in thinking of the lives of these followers of Noel's religion. All day his mind dwelt upon them; and when he arrived home for supper he found a further collection of them enjoying Mrs. Crayne's hospitality.

The company was just beginning the meal when the Kansan entered. Noel apologized to him for not waiting, then introduced him to the five guests.

Peter studied them as he ate in silence, and soon decided that they were remarkable types. There were an Englishman, with flashing black eyes and an eloquent tongue; a Yankee, with an intellectual forehead and a Puritanic mien; a Scotch-Canadian, who spoke well-thought-out words and rolled his "r's"; and two Westerners, Rollins and Chapman: the former evidently fond of hearing his own voice; the

latter a rough-and-ready, Buffalo-Bill sort of individual, full of wit and laughter.

Peter decided that he liked all of them, with the exception of Rollins. Rollins struck him as being insincere; although he was mild of speech and had a certain pleasing manner, his voice did not ring true.

The Kansan expected to hear a theological discussion, for here were men from important places in the church, who did not meet each other very often and must have ideas to exchange. But they did not touch upon religion at all. Instead, they discussed the questions of the day; politics, national and international; science, invention, and literature. Peter was surprised and delighted with their breadth of vision. He secretly hailed them as brothers, in spite of their religious views. They were men of ideals and ideas; dreamers, but active dreamers; thinkers and doers. But, best of all, they took themselves seriously.

Peter had no patience with that school of egotists who ridiculed the serious-minded. Was not life a serious matter? If not, then why not be done with it as quickly as possible; perform the one consistent act of suicide?

Mr. Chapman amused himself by poking fun at Mr. Rollins, while the Englishman and the Scotch-

Canadian debated a matter of British Imperial policy. Needless to say Peter followed the latter. Once he caught a somewhat cynical smile on the Yankee's face, and wondered at it. Later he was enlightened when this descendant of Puritans condemned royalty and imperialism in such pointed phrases that both the other controversialists came to a full stop and generously admitted their inability to answer him.

The Yankee then reminded his brothers that they were ignoring certain members of the company, whereat the big Canadian, Murdoch, rolled out an apology and hurled a question at the speechless Kansan.

"I take it you are a Missourian, Mr. Bosten," he said. "What do you think of the Kansas agricultural and prohibition movements?"

Peter explained that he was a Kansan, and put his views on the questions mentioned into concise form. Immediately, he discovered, he had the attention of all present. Even Rollins looked interested.

But in the course of his remarks he made a statement involving the charge of overzeal, and it was mildly challenged by the Englishman.

"Do you think," he asked, "that we can be too zealous in a good cause?"

"Well," said Peter, "our very zeal itself may per-

vert the goodness, and then the cause is a bad one."

The Canadian voiced a laugh similar to Noel's, and with a smile the Yankee asked for a clearer elucidation of the point.

"Take the cause of Christianity, for instance," Peter went on, aware that he was throwing down the gauntlet against big odds. "For argument's sake we will admit it is a worthy one. You gentlemen believe it is; and so do I, though I leave the divine out of it. Now, has not the zeal of its advocates, according to the teachings of your church, resulted in innumerable human additions to and subtractions from the original gospel of Christ?"

The Canadian deferred to the Englishman.

"I grant you that," said the latter. "But I ask you what was the nature of this zeal?"

"Religious," was the instant reply.

"And what do you mean by 'religious,' may I ask?" the Yankee, Fraser, put in.

"Affecting man's conduct before a supposed Creator," Peter defined. "And since man interprets this conduct according to his own mind, it differs as the minds of men differ. In other words, man makes his religion, and, naturally, makes it to please himself. Moreover, if his zeal in this creed-making is stronger than his human desire to deal justly with his fellow creatures, he will do great damage—yet be unaware

of it because of the abnormal condition of his mind. I refer you to the Inquisition and other diabolical feats of so-called children of God."

Noel's face was glowing with interest, and he gave Peter an encouraging smile. Mrs. Crayne, too, was greatly pleased. It was their belief that so long as a nonmember encouraged legitimate argument there was hope for him.

Three of the missionaries exchanged smiles indicating intellectual appreciation. They even included the Kansan in their approving glances.

"Go after him, Roland," said Murdoch to the Yankee, grinning good-naturedly.

"Mr. Bosten"—the Easterner instantly acted on the hint,—"I'm going to take sides with you. Human zeal is a foolish thing, very often. My brothers here have been leading you on: they believe as you do. The point that remains to be made is this: without the love and understanding of the Spirit of God in our hearts, our activities are in vain. This church meets the world on that very issue. And as you are evidently a logician I will not beat about the bush. We believe the fullness of God's Spirit is obtainable in only one way: by obeying his gospel."

Peter nodded understandingly.

"There is where I admire you people," he declared. "You do not equivocate, but boldly assert

your convictions; and I must say, if a man believes the Scriptures he must heed your claims. I think your church preaches the nearest thing to real religion that I know. You claim that the gospel has been restored to earth, by miraculous means; that miracles still continue, and that God is unchangeable. There you render other sects inconsistent. You have the organization of the Christ church, apostles and all; and in innumerable ways you are consistent with those principles which you claim to be eternal and changeless. But you see, I do not accept any religion at all; I reject the Bible as the poetical record of an egotistical race; I do not believe in prayer. In fact, I am what they call an agnostic. Now, what I want to know is this: What do you do with an individual like myself? If your church can not dispose of me, none can."

Mr. Chapman drawled out a reply; but twinkling eyes belied his sober face.

"My dear boy," he said, "you are damned beyond all hope. Fire and brimstone await you."

The Puritan laughed outright, for the first time.

"Do be serious, Chapman," he begged. "Answer Mr. Bosten yourself. I don't believe you can."

A fighting light illuminated the old veteran's face, and ignoring his brothers he turned to the Kansan.

"My friend," he said, "your views may strike you

as being original, but believe me they are as old as the hills." The speaker paused, and Peter put in:

"But their age is not an argument against their logic."

"True." The Westerner opened his eyes wider. "Say," he smiled, "you have a keen brain, by George you have!" Turning to Noel. "Where did you pick him up, Noel?"

Peter was not in the least offended by this remark. He knew the ways of such pioneers as Mr. Chapman; knew that beneath their crude surface precious gold was often found.

"He comes from a Kansas farm," replied Noel, glancing at his friend.

"That accounts for it," said Chapman. "But coming back to the point, Mr. Bosten. What I wanted to say, when you tripped me up, was that there *is* no way of answering what we call an infidel. Those who believe in Christ and those who do not, talk different languages. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and they are not comprehensible to the carnal mind."

"But," Peter objected, "religionists have done unspeakable things on that same hypothesis, since the beginning of time. The Buddhist mother sacrifices her child to the flames. When we rationalists object,

on humanitarian grounds, the only answer we get is a metaphysical one."

The Westerner whistled, good-humoredly.

"Brother Rexton," he said, turning to the Britisher, "I turn him over to you. He's a psychologist: and I never went beyond public school myself."

Mr. Rexton showed no signs of gratification at being thus appealed to. His eyes became more serious as he looked frankly at the nonbeliever.

"We all have finite minds, Mr. Bosten." He spoke pensively. "We can not find out God by digging in the earth with these hands of clay or peering into limitless space with these mortal eyes. We must have faith."

"Pardon me, Mr. Rexton," Peter interrupted, "but you must remember that what is argument to a religionist is mere assumption to me. You have made an unproved assertion."

The apostle, for such he was in that church, nodded.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You are right. But nevertheless it is all I can do. As Brother Chapman remarked, your school and mine speak in different tongues. I only know that once I, too, thought as you do. But when I heard the gospel it appealed to me, I was going to say, almost against my reason; and the more I know of it the better I love it. I

know that I am but a child in it yet; but it offers endless opportunities for advancement; moral, intellectual, spiritual. And I hope I may live to bring many honest hearts into it."

Peter was silent. As he had, so many times before when Noel was speaking, experienced a peculiar thrill, so did he now. He explained it to himself thus: The sincerity of these people is overwhelming. I love them for it. Yet, as the universe is my witness, I can not believe as they do. This thrill I feel in their presence is a human emotion, which I can not comprehend any more than I comprehend my love for Helen. One day, perhaps, everything will be understandable to me.

"Gentlemen," he said, respecting them for the silence they had maintained awaiting his reply, "I believe you are all honorable men, and therefore I admire you. But our minds have not been cast in the same mold, I am afraid. Maybe we shall see things more clearly in the next state of being, whatever it shall be."

Peter chanced to look toward Mrs. Crayne, and was surprised to see a tear in her eye. She brushed it away embarrassedly, and passed Mr. Rollins the sugar.

Although the Kansan felt that it must be apparent to these lights of the church that they had been

worsted in argument, he was aware of no coldness or "ecclesiastical suspicion" (he coined the phrase on the moment, thinking of disputes with certain professors in a Kansas university), on their part. Rather, he realized that his sentiments had made these missionaries his friends. In spite of their belief that he was groping in the dark, they treated him as a peer; and he could read in their very manner a charitable desire to free him from the bonds of doubt and make him a brother in spirit.

Peter meditated on this disposition toward "outsiders" that characterized great and small in Noel's church. The faith of fools and religious humbugs might be a detestable, a disastrous thing; but what of this brand of faith, exemplified in the lives of Noel's "brothers," so generously mixed with religious toleration and "Christian" charity? Might there not, after all, be something to it? And if there were, how far from the truth must he, Peter Bosten, be!

After supper the Canadian missionary drew him aside.

"I promise not to involve you in any long discussion," he apologized; "but I'm really curious to know, Mr. Bosten, how you got started thinking along the lines you do."

"Well," the Kansan answered, "it would be hard to say; but I'm afraid the notorious Voltaire was

one of my early inspirations. I shall always remember a quotation he makes from Aristotle: 'Incredulity is the foundation of all knowledge.' Don't you think that is a logical statement? It has always guided me."

Murdoch repeated it in an undertone.

"I am familiar with the sentiment," he replied, "but not the phrasing. Yes, from a purely human viewpoint it is convincing. But it ignores the divine."

"The point of separation—divinity," said Peter.

"Yes," returned the Canadian; "that's it. The dividing line."

One of the other preachers approached Peter. It was Rollins.

"Young man," he said, half playfully, "if I were you I'd go to God in prayer and ask him for light."

For the first time in the evening the Kansan felt resentment. He knew now, definitely, that he did not like this man.

"Mr. Rollins," he replied, "why ask God for light when I have his servants here to inform me? I noticed you didn't take up any of my challenges at the table."

Color crept into the missionary's face.

"I always defer to those in higher authority," he said. "It is the only way to do in this world. I

recommend such action to all those, especially, who set themselves up as judges of what is holy."

Peter moved away from this gentleman, who seemed a more conventional member of that body, the clergy, than any preacher of Noel's church thus far encountered.

When the guests had gone, Mrs. Crayne busied herself with the dishes, refusing to allow the boys to help her; and Noel and Peter sought their favorite seats on the veranda. Not to smoke and peruse the sporting extra, as a hundred young men were doing on the same street; but to enjoy each other's conversation, and, maybe, take one of their accustomed flights above the smoke and dust of earth.

Noel was anxious to know how his friend liked the visitors. Peter was giving an interested, personal analysis of each when a figure passed down the walk, distracting Noel's attention.

For several minutes thereafter the Missourian was distraught, and Peter recalled what Helen had told him on one of their motor excursions.

"A penny for your thoughts, Noel?"

The remark startled the dreamer out of his dream, and he faced a malicious grin.

"And I want the truth, remember," Peter persisted.

Noel did something decidedly original—for him.

He glanced around to make sure no one should witness his act, then drew his chair closer to the Kansan's.

"Peter," he said, in an undertone, "you are a clear-eyed fellow. Tell me, what do you think of Adele Cressy?"

It was she who had just passed. The Kansan coughed comically.

"Do you want my worst opinion or my best?"

"Both."

"All right. Here goes. Noel, she has always been something of a puzzle to me. I have watched her in the choir and in prayer meetings. I have studied the glances she has bestowed on you—now don't get excited. You know about them as well as I do. And can you guess my worst criticism of her?"

The Missourian shook his head and waited.

"It's this: she is inclined to be a coquette."

"Oh, is that all?"

"I think so, although I'm not quite sure. You didn't ask for facts, you know: just an opinion. And the best thing I can say about her is—"

He paused.

"Yes?" said Noel, eagerly.

"—that she's in love with you," Peter finished, facetiously.

They called each other uncomplimentary things

until epithets had lost their edge; after which Noel made a singular confession. It had almost escaped him a score of times. Now it came out.

"It may be an unmanly thing to say, Peter, but—well, I wouldn't tell anybody on earth but you. I feel sure that I love Jessie and that one day we shall marry. But in spite of this conviction, when Adele Cressy comes near me I get all excited, and, in short, act like a species of lunatic. I can't explain it."

"Doesn't Jessie affect you like that, too?"

"No, she doesn't. I have a happy, peaceful, secure feeling with her—until Adele comes along. And then I become abnormal—yes, it is not a normal sensation, surely."

"I'll bet I know how you explain it to yourself, Noel."

"How?"

"You say that your passion for Adele is physical, and that for Jessie spiritual."

"Exactly! How ever did you guess it?"

"Because I know you—and your religious brothers. I refer to the members of your church. By Jove! you are a wonderful lot, I've got to admit it. Noel, if you belonged to any other denomination I'd predict that you would forsake Jessie for Adele. The question of religious duty would have no weight with you; or little, at any rate. But I am just as

sure you will marry Jessie as I am that you are a man in a million. It is inevitable."

The Missourian looked long and bewilderedly at his friend.

"Peter," he said, slowly, "I thank God we ever met."

But the Kansan seemed not to hear. He was thinking of Helen Dyke and of her allegiance to her faith; wondering whither his own love would tend, and longing vainly for the impossible.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIVIDING LINE

It was on the morning of the sixth of April that Peter met President Milton Stern, the head of the church. The Kansan was standing on the stone steps of the white stone edifice with Noel, admiring the Temple Lot, pink with peach blossoms, when a large, loosely-garbed figure approached; shouting, before he reached them:

"Hello there Noel, old boy! How goes the battle?"

The man had halted, to pick up something, and taking his friend by the sleeve Noel cried: "Come on, Peter, and let's stop him before he enters the church. I want you to meet him."

Mr. Stern said to Peter, as they shook hands, that he was glad to make his acquaintance; and Peter believed it. But one thing was hard to believe: that this was the president of a church with a membership close to one hundred thousand; or the president of any church, for that matter.

While the other two conversed Peter stood aside and appraised Mr. Stern. He was over six feet tall, broad-shouldered, athletic. His hair needed cutting, his suit needed pressing and his shoes a shine. Yet he did not look in the least uncouth. Certainly he was a Westerner. The smell of the loam hovered

about him. One would not have been surprised to see a bird come, any minute, and perch on his shoulder.

Contrary to his sense of the fitness of things Peter found himself thinking of heroes in Western dramas. They were not so overdrawn after all. He remembered, particularly, the play which foreign critics pronounced the greatest American drama: "The Great Divide." Here was the flesh and blood of that story; not a New York actor dressed up to look like the real thing, but the real thing itself. Peter could still feel the rough pressure of his large hand, essentially a hand of toil, whatever form that toil might take.

"You are in a hurry, Brother Stern," said Noel, "I won't keep you."

"Brother Stern," Peter murmured. "They call him brother!"

"All right, Noel. I'll see you again. And you, too, Mr. Bosten."

The name had not escaped him. He turned his eyes upon the Kansan and smiled. They were full, penetrating eyes, set in a large, almost pugnacious face. But the smile moderated the pugnacity—there was something decidedly boyish about it.

Noel glanced at his friend when the president had disappeared.

"Well, Peter, how does he strike you?"

"By Jove!" was the reply, "I'd hate to have him do it. But say, Noel, are you sure this is really President Stern? I can't get over it."

Noel chuckled; pleased that Peter was impressed.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Nothing. Nothing. That's the trouble. He ought to be sad-looking or gray-haired or lame. But he's as fit as a prize fighter. He's boyish. He's jolly. Why, he's the very kind of a pal I'd want on a long hobo trip. He'd help you clean up on a posse, and then sit down with you and philosophize on it. For he's a philosopher; you can read it in his eyes. Those are strange eyes of his, Noel. They're hypnotic—do you know that? And I'll wager he's got a memory a mile long."

Peter paused a moment, but began again the moment Noel opened his mouth.

"I'm glad I met him, mighty glad. President Stern is a man clear through. I like him; you bet I like him. . . . He seems to think a whole lot of *you,* Noel?"

"Not necessarily. He's that way with everyone."

"Pardon me, but I don't believe you. He may be tolerant; but I can imagine him eating some of these little Christians of yours here alive."

"Why, Peter!" exclaimed the Missourian, "that's

the first hard thing I've heard you say about any of our people."

"Well, I'm sorry if it sounds hard, Noel. But somehow or other Mr. Stern makes most of these other brothers of yours look small by contrast. I guess I am thinking of that fellow Rollins. I don't like him. Do you?"

But Noel evaded the question. The only time he ever proved evasive was in such an instance as this: where the interests of person and not principle were involved. Peter sat down on the steps, pensively.

"We'll have to move," his friend observed, presently. "Conference convenes this morning, you know, and the crowds will soon be pouring in."

"Yes," the Kansan agreed. "This is the big day. I'm glad I'm here, Noel. It will be an experience for me."

"It may convert you," grinned the Missourian.

"Anything is possible, I suppose," Peter returned, queerly. "The President may even challenge me to a wrestling match if I refuse to become a member."

"It wouldn't be the first bout of the kind for him, either. In his youthful days he was champion of all the sports."

"Sounds like fiction," Peter murmured, thinking of the intensely spiritual nature of this church's doctrines. . . .

Half an hour before the time appointed, the main auditorium of the church building began to fill, and when President Stern and his two counselors arose, as one man, to announce the opening prayer, there was no standing room left in the place.

Noel and Peter occupied a seat in one of the wings, where they could see the faces of a greater part of the congregation and also of the many missionaries and other ministers on the large rostrum. Adam E. Stern, cousin of the President, and one of the "First Presidency," offered the prayer. Peter observed that the extended hand trembled slightly, as did the speaker's voice. Words full of soul and meaning for that congregation were being uttered, Peter knew; but although they stirred his emotions, too, they did not illuminate his mind, and he could not conscientiously murmur "amen" with the bowed heads around him.

General business having gotten under way Noel began to point out conspicuous characters to his friend. Also, he explained the arrangement of the "priesthood," naming the different sections in the order of their prominence.

"You will find all the officers here that are named in the New Testament," Noel declared. "Our organization is complete."

"So I believe," Peter returned. "It is certainly

impressive. I like the second Mr. Stern. Do you know of whom he makes me think, Noel?"

"No; I can't say."

"Doesn't he remind you of a great character in religious history?"

Noel thought a moment.

"You are thinking of the Christ?"

"Yes," Peter admitted. "The same sort of face, I imagine."

"If one of our church members hinted at such a thing, can you conceive of the cries it would arouse, Peter?"

"Very readily. That's because most Christians take Christ's character away from him when they condescend to worship him. Do you know, Noel, I hold that word *worship* in contempt. It is deceptive. And as for Jesus of Nazareth, a great reformer whom I admire beyond expression, but who has been grossly misrepresented, I think he would reject most of his professed followers to-day, should he come again, as he did the Jews."

Noel agreed with him, and they turned their attention to the President. He was making a ruling on a point of order. The masterly manner in which he did it commanded Peter's admiration.

"I knew his mind was like that," was the Kansan's comment. . . .

For three consecutive mornings the two friends sat in the same section of the main auditorium; during which sessions Peter was provided with material for months, even years, of reflection. He noted, with gratification, the freedom of speech accorded every member of the conference; and took a keen interest in the discussions. Mind was pitted against mind, and there was no end of genuine eloquence. Once or twice there had been apparent a note of personal feeling; but in spite of heated arguments, when the business sessions ended and the President or his advisers offered the benediction, Peter had to admit that there was a splendid spiritual harmony throughout. And, he realized, it was based upon the unity of their faith; aye, deeper, of their love. He called it a "psychological phenomenon."

The event to which the Kansan looked forward more than anything else was the first Sunday morning preaching service, for Milton Stern was announced as the speaker. As there were many visiting singers, anxious to display their powers, Peter begged Bertha Kirkton to release him from the choir, and, with some embarrassment, obtained the same favor for Helen Dyke.

He sat with her out in front, where he could look the preacher in the face and weigh every sentence. It was clear to him that Helen approved of his in-

terest, and hoped for something as a result of the sermon; for he had told her of his impressions about Mr. Stern, eliciting the reply from her: "A mind like yours will never be able to resist his mind, when it is backed by inspiration."

Helen made a practice of ignoring his skepticism and speaking to him as though he were a member of the church, which amused Peter considerably. She refused to debate with him on metaphysical grounds, not because she lacked intellect, but because she believed in the power of psychic suggestion as well as faith. Peter often twitted her on her attempts to "hypnotize" him, but invariably failed to involve her in a discussion that ignored the principle of belief in the divine.

He knew as he sat beside her this morning, waiting for President Stern to rise, that she counted on the "power of the Spirit" to aid the speaker in impressing a hostile mind; but Peter did not fortify his thoughts against possible impressions. He felt that he should welcome them, providing they appealed to his reason; and besides, the face of the big man before him, bended as it was over a book in his hand, reassured the Kansan against poetical illusions and sacred platitudes. He knew that what would be presented for his consideration would be worthy of any man's consideration.

His knowledge was based upon observation and character insight.

While the assisting pastor was making some announcements Helen whispered to her companion that he must not expect too much, in the way of oratory, as the President was not considered so stirring a speaker as one or two of the Twelve, particularly John Leader.

"Some even consider him a trifle cold and academic," she admitted.

"Thank goodness for that," Peter murmured; wondering, it must be confessed, if she had had a partial reaction against "inspiration." "I'll hear something logical, then."

The Kansan was not mistaken. Nor was he disappointed. But he was not thrilled in the same manner as when Adam Stern had prayed the opening prayer of the conference.

He listened to a sermon that lifted his mind into noble planes of thought; that showed him visions of the infinite, and yet intentionally fell short of speculations concerning the unknown. Of course, the President made faith in God and communication with the Divine a cardinal element in his argument, but he enlarged the conception Peter had had of this faith; made it, in some mysterious manner, more acceptable to the analytical brain.

The chief thought in Peter's subconscious mind, as he listened to the strong even tide of Mr. Stern's sermon, was that there must be some *reason* for the faith of a man of this caliber. The speaker was not of the type that is swayed by sentiment. His muscular jaws spoke of battle and his bulging forehead of tempestuous thoughts. He had not arrived at his present status of mind without an intense struggle; of this the Kansan felt positive. But how did he manage to retain—how had he managed in the first place to secure—this faith of which he spoke, which was the faith of a hundred thousand souls?

The question sat upon Peter heavily, but did not render him deaf to the speaker's train of thought. Obviously the sermon was directed to those inside the church. They were admonished to be guided by their better selves, and renounce mental and moral slavery of every sort. They were treated not as a mass of unthinking creatures who must rely upon the clergy and obey them, but as rational though faithful beings who must fight out their own salvation, under the guidance of God and the weak instruments he used to perform his work. They must not look for infallibility in the priesthood. Such blindness had always led to folly, in this and other ages. There must be no popery in this church. Let every

man and woman look to the Creator as the fount of information and comfort, and to him alone.

But even on this point the President showed his superiority of conception over the average mind. He pointed out man's duty to himself and his fellow man regardless of divine revelation.

"There are certain interpretations which each of us must make upon the law of God, daily, in our own little lives," he said. "Interpretations affecting not fundamentals, but the application of what we may term 'minor' gospel principles bearing upon special situations that confront us constantly. And here we must be guided by our conception of common rectitude; our common sense, if you will. We must exercise our judgment, try out our ideals, and be active, not passive, in the great evolving universe of God."

The speaker closed the avenues of individual egotism by making each of his hearers acutely conscious of the rights of his fellow creatures, material and moral; but at the same time showed the way to a fuller enjoyment of legitimate free agency and the laudable exercise of human initiative.

The sermon came abruptly to an end, and the Kansan was conscious of waiting for something—he scarcely knew what. A glance at Helen told him she was rather disappointed, and Peter wondered if she had caught the expression of his face.

While more announcements were being read and an anthem sung Peter searched his mind for a clew to the sensation of incompleteness of which he was aware. And by and by, he thought, he found it. There was but one missing link—yet it broke the chain. He had agreed with President Stern on every point, followed him eagerly; even anticipated him at times; and had been earnestly desiring to reach the same conclusions as the speaker. But when he (Stern) had taken both ends of the chain and welded them together, and Peter had essayed to do the same with a like chain of his own, the latter found a link missing. The link was Faith.

Peter felt queerly disappointed. Minds like this man's were rare. It would be a joy to share his views; nay, something more than a joy.

But that might never be. The Kansan sighed as he followed Helen mechanically up the aisle.

On the street the first words she addressed to him were:

"I'm afraid you were disappointed, Peter. I know I was."

"On the contrary, Helen," he returned, "it was the finest series of utterances I ever heard from the pulpit. There was personality and logic behind it."

She was silent a moment.

"I don't like to criticize such a fine man as Brother

Stern," she observed, thoughtfully, "but I really do think the Spirit was not with him to any extent this morning."

The Kansan smiled oddly.

"He was not emotional, Helen, if that's what you mean."

A rebuking glance was his punishment for this remark.

"To-night," she said, "we will hear Brother Leader again. The whole conference is waiting for it."

Peter experienced a species of resentment.

"Helen," he spoke seriously, "I don't think Mr. Stern is fully appreciated—with all due respect to your church. He comes nearer to making God comprehensible to me than any preacher I have ever heard or read. But even he has failed. I can't believe, Helen; I can not. And in my present state of mind I don't think Mr. Leader's eloquence would appeal to me. It is not of the character of Stern's, although I can not explain the distinction in words."

"You mean that you don't care to come out to-night?"

They were walking down Grandview Avenue.

"I—well,—yes, Helen. I should like to spend the evening with you, if you don't mind. I have something to tell you—something that has been on my mind for a long while."

He observed that some of the color left her cheeks as she replied:

"Peter, unless you open your eyes to the light of truth, and humble yourself before God, I think it better that you should—that we should—."

She broke off, and the tears came into her eyes.

"You mean that unless I learn to see as you do, love must cease between us?"

He felt his heart instinctively hardening to fortify him for the ordeal, and found it impossible to say what he wanted to, exactly, in the way he wanted to.

She nodded, and dabbed at her cheeks with a tiny handkerchief. The movement, insignificant though it looked, nevertheless caused a great flood of anguish to sweep over the Kansan. He was carried back to their first meeting, and the innumerable happy times they had spent together, over country roads and upon lake waters. This was the one woman for him; her every grace proclaimed the fact: and yet a chasm had opened up between their souls and widened with the passing of the weeks.

"Helen," he asked, after an awkward pause, his masculine nature brutally asserting itself in spite of his crying it down, "would you rather listen to Mr. Leader's sermon to-night than to what I have to tell you?"

She had conquered her emotion and was meeting his gaze now with feminine pride.

"Some things are a matter of choice," she returned; "others a matter of duty."

"You are fencing," he said. "Which do you intend to do?"

"You are unfair," she answered. "You place me in a dilemma and then torment me."

He was struck with the justice of her accusation.

"I ask your forgiveness." He spoke humbly. "Helen, dear, let's not quarrel. I will go with you to-night, but you must see that there is no hope for me as a Christian. I am essentially a nonbeliever. Yet would I never interfere with your faith. Must this question of religion blight our lives?"

They had chosen a shady spot on the grass at the southern extremity of the Temple Lot. She raised her mysterious eyes to his and answered:

"There must be something wrong with you, Peter, or you would believe. The gospel of Christ is beautiful,—when you have it in its fullness. You are blind, and I am afraid you are intentionally so."

This accusation hurt him, because he believed it to be unjust. He was silent, weighed down by the burdens of his mind.

"The time may come when you will see your stubbornness and your hardness of heart, Peter. When

it does (I say 'when' because I believe it will come) then you may tell me what you wish to tell. But it would not be right for me to listen now."

He tried to reply, but the words stuck in his throat. There was a pang in his soul, and he wanted to get away by himself. He had not realized before how vital a thing Helen's faith was. He knew she loved him, but he also knew, now, that she would give him up in preference to her religion.

Peter, the agnostic, grew bitter at the thought of it. The best he had to give was cast aside for an illusion; a belief at best.

The spirit of President Stern's sermon came to him; the human not the "divine" spirit. Now it dawned on him what had been so compelling about it: the element of mortal uncertainty that ran through it. In the efforts of such men as Leader this human doubt was not apparent; it was swallowed up in swaying eloquence. But into the language of the great-minded Stern, the individual who was more a man than a preacher, had crept this honest strain of agnosticism. It was the thing that made the sermon "cold" to such thinkers and believers as Helen and the rest; but logical to minds like the Kansan's.

But there was no such element in Helen's faith. She set herself up as her lover's judge, so it seemed

to Peter, as unhesitatingly as she had criticized the unappreciated President's sermon.

Helen, the girl he loved, had become an egotist to him. He resented her attitude, bitterly.

"If you had the faith you profess," he said, after considerable reflection and in a voice that had again lost its warmth, "you would not fear me, or fear to associate with me,—even marry me. Unless," he added, "you doubted my sincerity. Is that it, Helen?" She did not reply and he interpreted her silence as consent.

This was a deep thrust. He experienced a strange soul reaction under the pain of it. He wanted to stay with her and fight it out, but her manner somehow took the heart out of him.

She did not, in the last analysis, really believe in him at all. This was the unwelcome conclusion he reached. She told him he was "blind," where, in reality, she meant that he was insincere.

"Do you mind if I let you walk the rest of the way home alone?" he asked, forcing a half smile.

The request seemed natural enough. There might be any number of reasons for it. Nevertheless Helen looked at him queerly as she gave him leave. And a moment after he had gone her eyes filled with tears.

Peter would have welcomed such relief himself; but he came from a race of men who hated sentiment,

so he merely compressed his lips and walked straight ahead, struggling against a passion of suffering that seemed half physical.

Far down the avenue, Helen turned to look after him; but the Kansan did not once glance behind. . . .

Peter did not see Helen again, at close range, during the conference; but an adventure, or rather the beginning of one, befell him that made it imperative for him to look her up. Believing her to be in the wrong he had been waiting for a note of apology; but, although it had not come, he must see her now.

As he walked down Grandview Avenue in the direction of a well-known bungalow his thoughts were divided between speculations concerning Helen's state of mind, and the singular chain of incidents that had encircled his life since coming to Petit City. He recalled the last item of conference proceedings: the assignment of missions: wherein his friend, Noel, had been ordained and assigned to the Maritime Provinces, Canada; and another friend, a Mr. Day, to the South Sea Islands. It was all so strangely romantic—so thoroughly in harmony with his own year's experience in this "city of saints."

His heart beat faster as he ascended the steps of the bungalow. He had not spoken to Helen for more than a week. Surely their meeting would be sweet.

No modern girl would continue to estrange herself from love for the sake of religion. It was too medieval, too monasterial.

Nevertheless, the Kansan was disappointed. He found that Helen had left town with some conference friends, and would be away for months.

He turned away heartsick and walked back toward Walton Street, wondering why she had not so much as said good-by. A letter awaited him, however. He read it mechanically.

"*Dear Peter:*

"You will forgive me for going away without seeing you; but I really think it for the best. There can be no love between us, so long as you reject the gospel. I have seen too many girls' hearts broken over religious differences to venture on dangerous ground myself, however alluring the present may seem.

"Some day we shall meet again. Then, I pray, you will be of a different mind about God.

"General delivery, Denver, will reach me for the next two weeks. "Yours sincerely,

"HELEN."

Again in his room the Kansan read the letter, then he crushed it passionately in his palm and threw it in the wastebasket. A few minutes later he sat

down to his writing table and hurriedly wrote the following lines:

"*Dear Helen:* You may have things as you wish. It is women like you and ideas like yours that have sent many a man to hell. But do not flatter yourself that I will go there—even though I am an unbeliever. I think I shall be able to get along without you or your religion, and still retain my respectability.

"One of your missionaries introduced me to a Brooklyn newspaper man, who had come to the conference on his vacation and with whom I had a long conversation. He offered me a place in the advertising department of his newspaper, and, without knowing just how you were feeling, I accepted it. I am to go East at once. So you see, I am not so broken up as I might be. "Good-by,

"PETER.

"P. S. You sign yourself 'sincerely,' but I presume I have no right to do so, lacking faith as I do."

Peter did not read the letter over before mailing it. He felt that he had said something that would hurt, and did not wish to ease, in revision, the smart of a single sentence. A moment after posting the letter he had a revulsion of feeling, but cried it down and set about packing his things for New York.

CHAPTER V

"THE BOY PREACHER"

A DARK young man and a fair young woman sat in a Pullman speeding over the Burlington route, northeastward. A fresh breeze through the screened windows ruffled their hair, and enhanced the brightness of their eyes.

Noel Crayne was starting out to be a missionary; Jessie Kirkton was accompanying him as far as Chicago.

"I can't realize that you are going away so far," she was saying.

Nor could he. His ordination and appointment had come so suddenly, it was like a dream. By and by he turned his face more directly toward her.

"Wouldn't the world think this a strange arrangement, Jessie? Here am I, with only a high school education; a painter by trade——"

"An artist," she corrected, and his bass laugh reverberated.

"But any money I've made has been at painting houses—not pictures. . . . I have never preached a sermon in my life. And yet I am on my way to a strange country as a missionary. Why, I haven't even got a black suit."

The bishop's niece smiled.

"My uncle started out without even a suit case, Noel; not riding in a Pullman like this, but walking over the country roads. He preached from house to house, bearing the message of salvation as the disciples of old did."

This brought a sigh from Noel.

"How times have changed in a few years!" he returned. "It seems to me there was more sincerity in the days of our fathers and mothers, Jessie. People did not pay so much attention to appearances, and there was more true religion in the world."

"I don't know, Noel. Do you think the moral movement is backward instead of forward?"

"It seems to me so. Of course, there is always a glamor over the past. It is hard to speak definitely on such a matter. How ignorant we are, after all!"

This train of thought suggested the Kansan.

"I wish I were going to pass through New York," the Missourian continued, "so that I could see Peter. By the way, Jessie, you have never given me your candid opinion of him."

"I've told you I liked him."

"Yes, but that is rather vague. What do you think of his character and viewpoint?"

She thought a while before replying:

"Somewhat twisted, I'm afraid. Undoubtedly he

has a keen brain, and he seems to mean what he says; but I have always felt that there was something lacking in him."

"Maybe," Noel ventured, "that is because you know he doubts religion and discredits our God."

She smilingly mentioned the fact that Peter Bosten always had a champion in a certain "maiden"-missionary, and admitted that the Kansan might have good qualities of which she knew nothing.

"But," she continued, "I know that Helen Dyke feels the same way about him as I do, in spite of the fact that she really cares for him."

Noel shook his head, as if to shake off an unpleasant notion.

"I'm sorry things have happened between them as they have. In many ways they were an ideal pair. Still, I believe they will come together again."

"They both have minds of their own, though."

"Which is a good thing," he smiled.

The conversation turned upon Mrs. Crayne, who, now that her only son had gone away from home, would be obliged to live with her married daughter.

"What allowance is she getting?" Jessie asked.

"Twenty a month. It should only have been seventeen, but your uncle insisted on making it twenty, which is very much like Brother Garner."

"Nobody knows his goodness, Noel, better than his

own relatives. If his critics could only see his private life and realize how thoroughly wrapped up he is in his duty, they would take pains to be fully informed before making their petty charges against him."

Noel could readily appreciate this, for he had an intimate friend, a bookkeeper in the bishop's office, who had often told him that never did widow or orphan "apply to Brother Kirkton for aid and receive a refusal."

The mention of church finance, which was a matter of much discussion and some misunderstanding at conferences, naturally led the young missionary and his sweetheart to think of their own material prospects. A mutual sigh betrayed their thoughts, and then with brave, serious smiles they discussed the question openly.

"Jessie," he said, "we will have to wait until the way opens up. We must expect a test of our faith; it comes to everybody. But I feel just as certain God will lead us to happiness as I do that I love you."

By some freak of mental action Adele Cressy flashed across his mind, as he made this utterance; and he recalled a recent conversation with Peter on the front veranda. However, Noel did not fear the charming Adele in Jessie's presence.

"My faith accords with yours," replied the bish-

op's niece. "Uncle has often told me of the struggles he and auntie had when they first married. Especially as the family grew were they constantly at their wits' end to exist. Yet they did exist, raised and educated their children, every one, and uncle did not give up his missionary work either. He has brought hundreds into the church, and helped thousands of members in it both materially and spiritually. The way, most assuredly, will open up for us." Directly she added: "Of course, until we get used to the separation it will be very hard, Noel. I hate to think of it."

He pressed her hand and gazed out of the window, speechless.

There is ample material for philosophy in life; especially in the lives of lovers. Noel and Jessie almost had a quarrel after the maiden-missionary's first sermon, delivered before a fairly large audience in the South Chicago meetinghouse.

Noel had spoken well, and the ladies especially, of whom a considerable number was present, had come around him to make his acquaintance and congratulate him. One girl, in particular, had put herself forward, and Jessie had observed that Noel seemed rather pleased with this "sister's" enthusiasm. An

informal invitation for dinner the next day had been forthcoming—and readily accepted.

It was after the dinner, on their way to the place where Jessie was stopping, that she made a remark bearing upon the Missourian's popularity and elicited a reply not altogether in harmony with Noel's nature.

In spite of their high ideals both of them were, *mirable dictu*, human; and one word led to another. She relieved her mind of a petty complaint involving Adele Cressy, and he intimated that a certain young Petit City man, Billy Moore by name, was still "living in hopes," and not being sufficiently discouraged.

The disagreement came to a sudden end, of course, in tears and forgiveness; but like many innocent incidents of life, it would resurrect itself later on, assuming greater importance as a memory than as an actuality.

The moment came when they must take leave of each other. Jessie's courage was an inspiration to the Missourian, and he endeavored not to look tragic when the train pulled out. Needless to say he only half succeeded.

Came hours of blankness, almost unconsciousness. The world was a speeding railway coach, with nonchalant passengers for inhabitants, which bore one

away from happiness; through fields and cities, strange, lonesome, loveless, into oblivion.

Finally Noel prayed to heaven for strength, after which he was able to take a casual interest in his surroundings. But it was not until he arrived in Boston that his heartsickness showed signs of leaving. There he was obliged to deliver another sermon, out in Somerville, and the preparation of the same filled his thoughts.

This second effort, like the first, was a success, and the Missourian remarked to a brother that the Spirit was with him, for he never could stand up before an audience and speak like that in his own strength.

Noel's faith was strengthened by the generous actions of the Boston church members, many of whom came to him with money and other gifts. He began to marvel at the wisdom of the scriptural system that sent Christ's representatives out "without purse or scrip," providing for their sustenance through avenues of individual sacrifice and faith in God; and contrasted it with the "salary calls" of innumerable preachers who claimed to be followers of the Nazarene.

He felt, as he sailed out of Tea Harbor on the *Nova Scotian,* that wherever he might go, his Protector and Guide would go with him; and all would be well. It did not matter that he knew no one, not

even the minister in charge of his new "field." A light would go before him, as in the days of the prophets, it went before God's servants.

The voyage to Halifax would have been pleasant, had it not been for memories of home. This was Noel's first long journey from loved ones, and it was one the end of which, in time and place, he could not foresee. He thought it incredible that other young men on board should gaze over the railing, smoke, laugh and flirt with the strange young women vacation-bound,—unconcernedly. Life could not be so serious a matter to them, surely, as it was to him!

But when a few weeks had passed the Missourian discovered that he, too, was prone to greet the day with laughter and his new-found friends with a jest. Missionary work was turning out to be a much more pleasant occupation than he had anticipated.

The local missionary in charge, Henry Davis, was a man whom everybody loved. For twenty years he had had charge of the Maritime Provinces mission, often without a single helper; and Noel found that in all that time "Brother Davis" had never made a real enemy or lost a real friend.

He was a man of between fifty and sixty years of age, but possessed the heart of a boy.

They got along together like two school chums. While awaiting the arrival of a preaching tent from

Montreal they studied together, went fishing and blueberry picking together, discussed literary and even sentimental subjects, and analyzed each other's minds with a freedom born of perfect understanding.

When the tent came they set to work trimming poles for it, and Brother Davis showed such dexterity with the ropes that Noel began to wonder if this man's accomplishments had any limitation.

"Dad," he said one day, using this familiar term for the first but not the last time, "it seems to me about the only thing you haven't done is write a book."

The old missionary rarely laughed; but when he smiled, which was often, a singularly happy twinkle came into his eyes, though his lips barely moved. Noel saw the twinkle now.

"Queer that you should hit upon my one deep secret so directly," came the answer. "I suppose you will think I am joking when I tell you I *have* written a book, and a novel at that. Everybody's doing it these times."

For days, thereafter, in the hours of leisure afforded them, they read over the manuscript together, Noel continuing to find hidden treasures in his companion's mind. The story was so far superior to the ordinary novel with which the Missourian was acquainted, that he urged Brother Davis to submit it

at once to a big publisher; but the elder missionary's eyes only twinkled.

"It would take a good mathematician," he said, "to count the number of times it has already been rejected."

This was appalling to Noel.

"What's the matter with the publishers?" he asked, indignantly.

"Maybe the trouble lies in the book, or—or the public."

"The public! That's it. They want sentiment and sickening drivel. Your story, Brother Davis, is too strong for them. It's the same way about religion, isn't it?"

The missionary in charge would assent to such statements with a kindly nod and go on reading aloud his manuscript. . . .

The Nova Scotians had taken kindly to the youthful Missourian. They named him "the Boy Preacher," and used him so well they might have spoiled him. There were several kind old sisters who occasionally bestowed a maternal kiss on him, sometimes to his embarrassment; and there were others who declared that he was responsible for a sudden interest in religion on the part of certain pretty Evangelines. But Noel did not allow kindness and

flattery to turn his head. He was too vitally interested in his work for that.

True, when he met Beth Farrar, with her baffling blue eyes that slanted like a geisha's, and her simple, attractive personality, he experienced delectably dizzy sensations, and found it hard to study for a few days; but when humiliation and remorse succeeded this inexplicable soul-wavering, and he had prayed for help, his missionary duties went forward again.

Nevertheless, in periods of self-communion, as he walked alone through the meadows sweet with the scent of wild roses, full of the joy and passion of youth, there stole into his dreams of home thought of Beth Farrar; and although he longed to see her join the church, he hoped she would defer her interest in the tent meetings until he was master of himself. The moment such a hope arose within him, of course, he hated himself for the admission of weakness it involved, and wondered at the mortal perversity of a heart that could, for an instant, tolerate two loves simultaneously.

Ofttimes when struggling with himself in this manner a third vision hovered on the horizon of his dreams: Adele Cressy. Once the Missourian was obliged to laugh aloud at his sentimental folly. He was sitting down by a brook, at the time, making a sylvan sketch.

"I didn't know you saw me," said a light voice from behind him.

Noel started, and turned around.

"Why, Miss Farrar," he said, rising and coloring, "I didn't know you were there!"

"You didn't? I thought you saw my reflection in the brook. Why, you laughed?"

He felt embarrassed, and evaded the subject by handing her the sketch to look at.

"Splendid!" she cried. "I had no idea you were an artist, too."

"Neither I am," he returned. "But one can't study all the time, you know. And it does get a trifle lonesome here sometimes."

She turned those baffling eyes upon him, and there was a serious light in them.

"Indeed it must, Mr. Crayne," she said. By and by she added: "I have often wondered about the ministers of your church. They are such strange beings, most of them. Mr. Davis is such a lovely man; such a unique character. And others of your faith who have come here, young men little older than yourself, to convert us sinners"—she smiled attractively—"it is hard for me to understand. You, for instance; it is difficult to imagine you a preacher; and yet you *are* one."

Noel could not deny to himself that he was glad

Miss Farrar had found his seclusion. He spread a handkerchief on the grass to protect her white dress against stains, and after expressing a doubt as to the propriety of her action, and excusing herself on the plea that it had long been a habit of hers to write verses by the brook, evidence of which she supplied in the form of a writing pad, she consented to remain awhile.

"For I am really interested in knowing, from your own lips, Mr. Crayne, what it is about this religion of yours that prompts you to make such a sacrifice as you are making."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of her words. Noel straightway forgot externals in the message he bore to "all the world."

For nearly two hours, then, he told her about the gospel of Christ, as he understood it; of the apostasy from the "faith once delivered to the saints"; of the Dark Ages, during which the Scriptures had been corrupted, even as the law of Moses was corrupted by the Jews prior to Christ; of the reformation brought about by Luther, Calvin, the Wesleys and others; and finally of the restoration of divine authority, in its fullness, by what men called "miraculous" means. He told her of the poor and humble instruments God had used to confound the wisdom of the wise in "these last days," and of the hope he

had that Christ would soon return to earth again, this time as the King of kings. He pointed her to the signs of the times; wars and rumors of wars, men's hearts failing them, the increase of wickedness and infidelity; and many other things that were new to her.

Perhaps it was his manner rather than his words that really impressed her; but the fact remained that she was impressed, thrilled even as Peter Bosten had been the morning he first heard this earnest young Missourian's voice.

Finally Miss Farrar looked at her little watch with a shocked expression and hurried away; leaving Noel in a peculiar state of mind. Now that the burden of his message had been delivered he had mental leisure to consider the human aspect of the interview. Had the fair Nova Scotian, after all, really understood him? Might she not have seen a masculine as well as a religious light in his eyes, as he gazed steadily into hers?

Accustomed to being scrupulously honest with himself, he realized now that the interview had proved much more pleasant than it would have done had his interlocutor been an aged or uncomely person.

He sighed as he rose to leave the brook. This mission of his was becoming more complex every day.

He was aware of a tightening of the heartstrings, and of an evolution of thought.

Peter Bosten was, perhaps, more in his mind than anyone else. He could not help taking the Kansan's view of life and religion occasionally. As he gazed over the faces of his congregation betimes and realized that what he said was Greek to them, the terse phrases, the crystal criticisms on theology employed by the agnostic Peter, would cross his mind, often leaving miserable doubts.

Prayer was the only weapon Noel had against uncertainty; but even while praying he was sometimes conscious of a question in the back of his brain as to the reasonableness of it. Might not religion, as Peter claimed, be merely a means of self-deception, after all?

Brother Davis's companionship and counsel were a great solace these days, as were Jessie Kirkton's letters. But a post card came one day that brought a pang. It was from Adele Cressy, and stated that she had accepted an engagement with a musical comedy company and hoped to be an actress when next she saw him.

Noel prayed for her; but, such is the complexity of this frail mortal mind, he felt a certain amount of pride in her, withal, and pictured her carrying bouquets away from the footlights. The old phenom-

enon of a rise in temperature was in evidence as he read and reread the card; and he wondered why Jessie's letters had not more of the same effect.

Jessie he idealized. She occupied a throne in his mind. She was not flesh and blood, but spirit.

Adele was a warm potentiality, physical, enthralling, that seized him in unguarded moments and played havoc with his fancy.

The Nova Scotian, Beth Farrar, strange to say, seemed to be a combination of the two. Which mystery worried the puzzled Missourian unduly. He sometimes felt the earth tremble slightly beneath his feet, and in such moments thought of monks of the Middle Ages who had shut themselves up from temptation to keep their thoughts on high. But having no sympathy with such "devotion," and yet realizing with what uncertain steps he kept the narrow way amid life's allurements, Noel's career, as maiden-missionary, was difficult. Nor had he done with it yet.

Late in the summer Beth Farrar, whom the gossips had already accused of being in love with the "Boy Preacher," asked Brother Davis for baptism. Noel, it must be confessed, was not as happy over the event as he might have been. Away down in his heart there was a miserable semiconviction that himself, rather than the "Spirit of God," had been immediately responsible for the conversion. He con-

sidered this feeling decidedly sacrilegious, but in spite of that it insisted on lingering.

However, the way was opening up for him, as he had prayed and tried to believe it would.

Brother Davis took sick and was compelled to leave the Provinces. This left Noel alone in Nova Scotia; and a branch of the church in Kings County had not yet been visited.

The tent having been closed up for the summer, the Missourian was instructed by his senior to visit the church members southward, then report to the apostle of the Eastern Mission.

So Noel found himself preaching in a country schoolhouse, to rough, bearded lumberjacks and hardy sons of the soil. He delivered fourteen sermons in two weeks, ending by conducting the funeral services of a man who had died at eighty-eight years of age. He preached on the resurrection and the hope of salvation true believers in Christ cherish, reflecting, beneath his sentences, on the courage his faith imparted to him.

After the funeral service he bade these kindly, unsophisticated souls farewell and was showered with blessings, tangible and intangible. They had waited two years to see the visiting missionary of their faith, and when a mere boy had come with the

old words of wisdom they loved, the effect upon them had been dramatic.

Noel left them with tears in their eyes—and his own. Word had come for him to join Roland Fraser in Maine, until further notice.

He left Nova Scotia without bidding Beth Farrar good-by, knowing the parting would cause both of them a pang. That he could have allowed a serious attachment to form for her he well knew. That she already cared for him he dared not to think.

As he sailed out of Digby, bound for Saint John, he mused on the extent of man's emotions, and their contradictory nature; wondering if he would ever be wrecked, as others had been, upon the shoals of human passion.

CHAPTER VI

A MISSIONARY'S TROUBLES

THE Missourian spent several instructive and interesting months in eastern Maine, among the coast towns. Sometimes he was working with Roland Frazer, whom he found to be a remarkable character (occasionally exacting and austere, but usually as full of Christian charity as he was of personal magnetism) ; and sometimes laboring alone.

The phases of his work were numerous and diverse. For an entire week he had done nothing but keep house for an elderly sister who was sick and neglected, at the end of which two young women came to the rescue, meekly acknowledging their selfishness and declaring that the missionary had taught them a lesson they would never forget.

One other week he had taken a vacation, accompanying some of the fishermen on daily excursions among the lobster traps and fishing smacks. He tried to eat as many beans as they, on their recommendation that beans were the best protection against cold sea breezes; but failed ignominiously. But where fresh lobster salad was concerned he astonished even the heartiest seaman.

The young missionary tried to apply the teachings

of Christ to his everyday life, and act, in every situation, as he believed the Master of men would act. This endeavor, he discovered, kept him thinking of others so diligently, he was able to forget his own troubles in theirs.

In a few months Beth Farrar had become but a happy memory; a memory, however, which he knew could be revived by personal contact into a tormenting reality; and loneliness for Jessie Kirkton had mysteriously disappeared. Noel was convinced he still loved her, and would one day marry her; but no longer did the heart-burning keep him awake at night. Jessie had more than ever become spiritualized in his mind; she was an ideal that remained with him constantly, not to disturb but to soothe.

Adele Cressy was still in his thoughts, at intervals. When he skimmed over the whitecaps in one of the fishermen's launches, the nor'easter calling the blood to his cheeks and the sea birds screaming joyously through the foam, he sometimes experienced a keen desire to have Adele with him: she would enjoy all this so much!

He did not associate Jessie with such physical pleasures. In the calm of evening, seated by the fire with a book, he invariably conjured the image he loved; but out-of-doors, where the billows pounded the rocky shore and a salt breeze stirred virile na-

tures to the core, Noel could not help thinking of Adele, the girl so full of earthly joy and charm, whom he knew loved him with singular passion and for whom he was aware a certain part of his nature constantly cried out.

Often he pondered over the statement concerning Christ: "Tempted in like manner as we, yet without sin." Had the Master loved Mary with this mortal love, before his crucifixion, and renounced it for the sake of his mission? Certain maledictions recorded in history, directed against his morals, seemed to point to the fact of an attachment, though not the kind that his vilifiers pretended to credit.

If he had been tempted as we, would he have escaped the supreme trial of man's nature? Noel thought not. He believed that Jesus had loved; and, so far as this world and its pleasures were concerned, that love had been in vain. The thought was a great solace to the young missionary, who, by the way, was developing into a seasoned worker and losing his title of "the Boy Preacher." Adults often overlooked his youth now, when they listened to his utterances.

So even in his sentimental relations Noel studied to do as the Savior would have done. He continued to pray that distracting passions would not prove too much for his strength, and that the way would

be opened up for his marriage to Jessie, whose soul he conceived to be so pure.

Only two letters had come from the Kansan, and they were melancholy in tone. Noel replied to them at length, expressing the hope that he would soon have the pleasure of seeing his friend.

Shortly after Christmas a message from the minister in charge of the Eastern Mission announced that there was a temporary pastoral vacancy in one of the large eastern branches of the church. Noel was asked to report at Portland, to consider acceptance of the vacancy for a while. He did so, and was not returned to the coast towns, but sent to Ladner, a city in southern New Jersey.

The chief reason for his appointment to this place was that recently a large number of young people had come into the church here, and the minister in charge of the field believed a young pastor would be an inspiration to them. The permanent pastor had been obliged to sail for England and would be away indefinitely; and Noel Crayne was considered the very man to undertake the apostle's experiment. The church was endeavoring to give all the encouragement possible to the rising generation, for upon it depended greater things, perhaps, than had yet transpired in the history of the "Restoration."

Noel could not believe himself capable of perform-

ing the allotted task; he thought there were other more experienced and powerful men who might have been chosen. But his modesty was ignored. He was urged to take God into his confidence and do his best.

The first Sunday morning was something of an ordeal. The youthful preacher felt his knees tremble as he rose behind a pulpit where the best orators of the church had often stood. He saw before him several hundred listeners; men and women to whom he must seem but a child, both in years and knowledge. But he recalled the origin of the gospel, as restored in these "the last days"; the ignorant, inexperienced instruments the Almighty had used to carry his message of salvation forth; and took heart. Even as he made his opening remarks he was praying, in his mind, for courage and wisdom.

Presently a warm wave seemed to sweep over him, from head to foot, and his tongue was loosed. He knew what he was saying; every thought expressed was familiar to him; but he marveled at the fluency of his speech and the force with which his arguments left his lips. It seemed as if a power within him was doing the talking, and he, like the audience below, merely listened and understood.

The time passed with mysterious rapidity. The big clock at the rear of the auditorium reminded him that he had preached almost an hour. Then, sud-

denly, it seemed that a curtain was drawn before his spiritual vision; and he knew that his message had been delivered. He sat down with a sensation of physical weakness, resting his head in his hands. Tremors coursed through him and he wanted to weep, not from sadness but with joy sublime.

Came the inevitable handshakes and expressions of gratitude. Most of them were genuine; but Noel encountered one "brother" whose manner was patronizing and whose speech sounded insincere. It was no less a light than Thomas T. Jacobs, a man whose name was attached to occasional wordy letters in the church papers, and who was noted for his contributions to "charity."

"Brother Crayne," he said, adding—"I believe that is the name? Well, Brother Crayne, we are glad to have you with us. It will be a fine experience for you; and, in fact, I trust the benefit derived will be mutual. I want you to meet my son and daughter, who will bring you up to the house for noon dinner."

There seemed to be no doubt of a missionary's desire to accept such an invitation. The possibility of a refusal was not even considered. Noel, however, explained that although he should be happy to meet the son and daughter, he had promised to go elsewhere for lunch.

"Then you will come for supper," added Mr.

Jacobs, beckoning to his two children, who were waiting for him down the aisle.

The daughter, Millicent, was a pretty girl of perhaps twenty. She was dressed elaborately and had a way of arching her brows and puckering her lips when smiling, that struck the Missourian as being rather theatrical. Also, when she shook hands it was with a mere touch of the finger tips. Noel observed that she glanced at him coyly even after the introduction was complete, while he was speaking with the brother, Arthur.

Arthur looked and acted like his father. He was a tall, impressive individual, with an artistic face, which, unfortunately, lacked the deeper lines of earnestness. The missionary was wavering in his analysis of him when he, Arthur, said something patronizing (a habit, obviously, inherited from the parent); and then Noel decided he did not like Arthur.

However, Missourians are charitable, as a rule, even though they "want to be shown"; and Noel was no exception. He was, if anything, more generous-minded than the average. It was his creed, moreover, that it is better to err on the side of right than on the other side: and the highest expression of right involved thinking well of one's fellow creatures. He

determined to have no prejudices in his work here; but act as nearly like Christ as possible.

Act like Christ! He thought of that Supreme Reformer, who came not to bring peace but a sword; who drove the money changers out of the temple and called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites. Was it not the part of his servants to deal sternly with hypocrisy, as he had done?

Noel felt sad at heart as he reclined in a great morris chair in the Jacobs drawing room. About him was wealth and luxury, and before him sat a man of the world (though a brother in the church, ostensibly) and his well-groomed son, smoking cigars and conversing easily about "the morality of the world," "the cure of the gospel," "the salvation of the human family," "the ideals of the church," and so on; not realizing that they were dealing with the letter of the law and leaving the spirit out of it. They were speaking in formulas they had learned, Noel felt; and the task of making them see themselves in the light of the Gospel with a capital "G," seemed too great for him. He sighed heavily, and they smilingly accused him of being homesick.

For weeks the youthful missionary worried over the affairs of the church at Ladner. There were times when he longed to be back on the "firing line" again, preaching first principles, faith, repentance,

baptism of water and the Spirit, the resurrection, and the eternal judgment. Out among strangers he was not hampered by bad examples, weak personalities. He could show his hungry hearers the plan of salvation in all its purity and simplicity, without being pointed to lives wherein that plan had failed to produce satisfactory results—because of the unfitness of the soil.

Moreover, here in the city there were temptations that did not cluster about the path of simple country folks, out in God's green fields. There were allurements for tired souls, worn out physically and mentally by abnormal toil; for hasty youth, with its love of the artificial, the glamorous; for the superficial, whose natural tendencies were in the direction of pleasure: pleasure that might have taken an innocent form in the country, but drifted into channels of depravity here.

Noel had seen sin in the Petit City church; but there his had not been the responsibility of coping with it. Here he was pastor. It seemed incredible, but it was true.

Of all his cares, perhaps that of tolerating the evident insincerity (who should say whether or not it was conscious insincerity?) of the Jacobs family, sufficiently to help them, was the greatest. Often he wanted to use the direct method and tell them his

conviction regarding them. Indeed he would have done so, had he been as sure of his position as the Master was of his, in denouncing the Pharisees. But fearing in his ignorance to alienate those whom it was his duty to aid, he waited and prayed.

The inevitable break came at last, however, when Mrs. Jacobs, the most superior member of the family, detected personal allusions in certain remarks of the pastor's, and sent her husband to him demanding an apology. The manner in which Mr. Jacobs approached the Missourian overbalanced the latter's restraint. There was nothing manly about the approach. It was a tactical, sordidly diplomatic move, and Noel, for the first time in his ministerial career, became eloquent in personal rebuke.

There were no outward signs of hostility thereafter until the semiannual business meeting, in May. But at that meeting the storm which had been gathering broke in all its fury, and the Jacobs faction of the church sustained a motion requesting the pastor to resign; giving as a reason his youthful indiscretion in dealing with matters that were too delicate for one of his years to comprehend or control.

A lively debate ensued, in which Noel, of course, did not take part; but his supporters, including all but the Jacobs faction, did. Ranged on his side were practically all of the young folks, some of whom

showed signs of budding eloquence in their excited appeals on his behalf.

But ere the discussion had got well under way, Noel withdrew, (it was thought he had gone out but for a moment), and walked the city streets alone. His head swam and there was a nauseation in his soul. That he had more in his favor than against him did not seem to alleviate his suffering. He thought only of the struggle he had made to do his duty, and of the disheartening outcome. What had his work amounted to? The young people liked him. But what did that signify? Would they not have liked anyone who treated them even humanely? Would they not have liked a preacher of any denomination; had he proven himself a man in his dealings with them?

The work of a real Christian reformer was not to save the good but the wicked. But he, Noel Crayne, had merely stirred up the evil and set its stench expanding, to contaminate the entire body.

The spirit of Peter Bosten rose before him. What a noble character Peter was as compared with these squabbling, pride-enveloped "patricians" of the Ladner Branch! Jacobs and his family claimed to be "Children of God"; they had placed their names on the church records, and were in the habit of contributing to its treasury. So long as their sins were

not hinted at, they flattered and patronized and *fed* the pastor; but the moment he tried to help them see their folly, they turned on him almost as savagely as wild beasts, though, perhaps, with slightly better breeding, and demanded that he be ejected from their midst.

This was not Christianity, thought the Missourian. No wonder it sickened men like Peter Bosten. How could he, or any other level-headed, honest man be attracted to such a farce?

These people were not members of the church of God; they only thought they were. They were scribes and Pharisees. He had seen it in their eyes and felt it in the uncomfortable touch of their hands, the first day of his sojourn in Ladner.

Then who were the real members of the church and what was the church? Noel asked himself. But before answering, he tried to imagine the reply Peter would make, and there came into his mind the following sentiments:

"The church of God is an idol that men have set up to worship, because it is man's nature to worship something. The good members of this or that church are the consistent, honest ones, who try to act like human beings, rather than denizens of the jungle. Their goodness depends upon the relative worth of the idol set up; upon the status of the human ideals

cherished. Everything, after all, is judged according to man's reason, and in proportion as his reasoning faculties refine and develop, does his 'religion,' his law of life, improve."

Noel opened his mind to doubts. He wanted to be rid of thoughts associated with the hypocrisies of religion, so he tried to view the actions of man toward his fellows in the light of ordinary common sense. This mental inclination, he knew, was termed "doubt," but he was in a mood to go a step or two beyond the bounds of religious convention to-night.

Supposing Peter were right and he wrong, what new light would an interchange of beliefs throw upon the deportment of Jacobs, for instance? Instead of "offending the Spirit," Jacobs would be said to be "protecting his own interests"; "guarding his pride," instead of "hardening his heart." Was there any distinction, save in terms?

Noel lost himself in a maze of metaphysical speculations, and had not yet got back to his faith when he noticed that unconsciously he had walked directly to his boarding house.

He hesitated, wondering whether he ought to go back to the church or not. It was only nine o'clock.

The moon offering no solution to his problem, though he looked at it hard enough, he hesitated on the steps of the wooden veranda, moved toward the

sidewalk, then back, and finally darted into the house.

A few moments later he emerged, however, and began walking in the direction of the city's center.

As a matter of fact he had discovered a letter waiting for him on the hall seat and having found its contents, to say the least, disconcerting, knew his bedroom would be a prison, and betook himself he scarcely knew whither.

A kind, thoughtful sister had written from Petit City to inform him, "in all love and confidence," that a certain Mr. Moore (Billy Moore indeed) was paying undue attention to the bishop's younger niece, Jessie, who was not averse to going about with him now and then. The good sister's motive in imparting this confidence was not quite clear; but then Noel was in no condition of mind this evening to worry about motives. He was concerned with concrete facts, one of which was a motion made in a business meeting—.

But now this other fact took precedence. Jessie was still encouraging Moore. Why did she persist in doing it?

No man is just when he is in love (or thinks he is). Noel did not take into consideration his own flickerings of fancy, in Nova Scotia, and with a certain dream girl on various launch excursions with

the fishermen. Nor did he reflect that a year is a very long time to a girl who has not the innumerable duties of a traveling preacher to occupy her mind. Also, he failed to recollect that Billy Moore was an honorable man.

Our young Missourian wandered toward the city's "white lights" disconsolately. Passion beat against his heart, and his brain continued to whirl—though not with thought. He was too wrought-up to think: he only felt. His thinking machine had failed to run smoothly earlier in the evening. Now it had stopped altogether.

Not toward the church, where Mr. Jacobs and his lieutenants were doubtless still holding forth, but toward "theater row" he drifted. The human half of him was now in command. How strong it should prove, events will show.

Listlessly he stopped in front of a music hall to read the posters. He gazed, nonchalantly, then he blinked his eyes and stared hard. A familiar name stood out—or was he dreaming?

"Adele Cressy," he read, dazedly; "the girl who reached fame in six months."

CHAPTER VII

PETER COURTS THE MUSE

PETER BOSTEN had eagerly accepted the Eastern position, primarily because he believed it would better his prospects; in fact, pave the way to matrimony. However, when the break came with Helen, he lost interest in the material side of the matter, and went to New York solely for adventure. He had the pride of an ultra-independent spirit: he would demonstrate to a certain religious girl that her presence was in no wise necessary to his existence!

For a time, Helen's action had turned him against all members of her church, and he had bitterly described them as a "pack of narrow-minded fanatics"; but this frame of mind did not last. Memories of Noel Crayne, President Stern and others were too vivid. . . .

The Kansan was now a newspaper reporter on Park Row, or "Newspaper Row," one of the greatest news centers in the world.

It happened thus. He found, on the advertising staff of the Brooklyn daily, that here was the same old meaningless grind he had known in the Petit City electrical office. Nothing mattered but "getting business"; that is to say, Money.

Peter saw better prospects here, of course, of securing the Desirable Thing: but now he had no motive. There were no longer a love and a home to consider. And of what use was money except to retain the one and maintain the other?

The Kansan's was a peculiar, though typical, nature. He did nothing by halves. When he had loved Helen he had loved her with all his heart. But now that she was cut off from him, by an act of her own, he endeavored to put her entirely out of mind; and was more successful than the average man would have been. However, the process had involved a change in his sentimental nature. Women did not appeal to him any more. Had he been blessed with the society of a mother and sisters, their influence would have tended to moderate this change in him. But he was without them, and so he became cynical about love.

Yet, having felt something go out of his life, naturally he cast about him for a substitute. This, such as it was, he found in New York more readily than he would have done anywhere else in America. He returned to his old love, the books, of which the Manhattan libraries supplied him with a great variety. Also, he enjoyed many of the newspaper editorials; and it was under their spell, perhaps, more than any other that he first conceived a desire to

write. It was born of a conviction (egotistical it may have been) that he had something to say.

This was about three months after his arrival in the East.

Characteristically, he lost interest in the advertising business forthwith and began searching for some sort of journalistic work. In a short time, by reason of his speed in shorthand, he obtained a position on one of the big dailies, in the editorial department, and went to work with might and main to learn the art of writing.

However, as the days and weeks went by, he discovered that a stenographer was by no means a writer. Particularly was this true of a stenographer on Park Row, where the mass of daily routine was so great that one had to work nights, frequently, to make any headway at all.

Nor were editors the romantic fellows Peter had supposed them to be. They chewed cigars and cursed copiously, most of them. Some of them were most intemperate. How they contrived to turn out such elevating editorials was a mystery to him. Perhaps the reaction from their daily spiritual dissipation came in the evening, and they thought lofty thoughts merely for recreation.

Of course, he was not in very close touch with the greatest ones. They were more powerful than kings

in their realms, and might not be approached entirely without ceremony. When a mere stenographer did find himself in their presence he was apt to shiver a little—until he discovered their pet failing: after which he was able to study them to advantage.

For a few months the Kansan had been sufficiently interested in his environment to keep to the stenographic grind; but when he fully realized that journalism was coming no nearer to him by this means, he begged to be transferred to the reportorial staff. The man to whom he first made the suggestion was himself a reporter; one of the happy-go-lucky type, versatile, humorous, good-hearted, and leaning toward cynicism. He looked at the Kansan a moment in silence, a satirical smile beginning to play with his mouth.

"My dear fellow," he said, after some reflection, "I have been watching you, and I had come to the conclusion that here, at last, was a man who'd resist the virus successfully. Is it possible that, after the failures you've seen around here, myself included, you want to step on the trapdoor yourself?"

Whereat the sophisticated one turned away, murmuring profanely about "cubs," "bugs" and other members of the lower creation.

But no healthy Kansan ever allows the failures

and prejudices of others to frighten him. Besides, Peter was a logician.

"Because these chaps have not succeeded is no proof that I shall not," he mused.

His determination won the day for him, eventually. Of course, his salary as a reporter was not so much as a good stenographer's; but think of the opportunities for advancement!

Peter began the "rounds." At first it was instructive work. The activities of four million human beings, crowded into smaller space than would satisfy a respectable herd of cattle, could not but be interesting. Nay, they were more than this to the Kansan. The goings and comings of these creatures, so diverse in face and form; their fierce struggle for existence, their wiles and machinations, enthralled him—finally oppressed him.

He contrasted this abnormal, huddled existence with life on the Kansas plains. How little these wretched children of the Ghetto knew of life! The health officers said of certain sections that half the boys and girls who grew up were diseased of body and the other half diseased of mind.

Peter tried to reconcile the lives of these beings with his theory of evolution, but was aware of a conundrum somewhere. His mind traveled back to President Stern's sermon at the General Conference,

and he remembered the impression of the missing link. Here it was again.

"The limitations of mortal mind," he soliloquized. "Both the believer and the unbeliever come to the Gulf, which the former bridges with faith—and the latter leaves unbridged."

The Kansan sighed as he picked his steps along the filthy streets of the East Side, searching for something horrible to tell his city editor.

The thought of it disgusted him. He who felt in his soul a yearning to express great things; set down as no one had ever done before the mighty contrast between this ghastly Ghetto and life under the Western skies; must crawl about the slums, like the rat-eyed Bowery ghoul, searching for sensations, for filth.

One day he communicated his impressions to the city editor, and the latter, after regarding him intently a moment, replied:

"Third Avenue is just as respectable as Fifth, if not more so. May be a little more dirt there, of the material kind, but there is not more robbery, crime, immorality. I'd rather deal with one of those fish-daubed old Jews at Williamsburg Bridge than most of your fashion plates around Times Square."

This was the first time the city editor had shown signs of being human. Usually he was merely a

machine. Peter was interested in the phenomenon, and had a momentary sense of inferiority.

"But I was thinking of this news game," he returned. "Why do the papers go after shame and scandal with such an appetite?"

"Because," came the reply, which, however, did not interfere with some leaders the editor was writing, "the public demand it. We've got to be just as sensation-loving as they are."

Impulsively the Kansan answered: "I don't believe it. I think the newspapers ought to lead the way. Besides, we're working on a wrong hypothesis. We assume that *all* the people want this slime and scum. I know that is not the case. We cater to the lower forms, the unfit ones. We are mighty poor evolutionists, if you ask me."

The editor laughed as he continued to write leaders.

"I agree with you. But you and I are of no account. I advise you to interview the Business Manager."

Another time Peter went to his "chief" and expressed a desire to come "inside," as a "write-up" man; but the city editor was in a bad humor and sarcastically observed that "a cub from Kansas can't learn all about Babylon in a few months, and had

better know something of real life before gabbling about it."

This remark acted as a stimulus to the Kansan. He decided to continue on his "run" for a while longer.

In the evenings he began writing articles and verse embodying his observations, and reflections based upon them. His mind had always been of a serious turn, and now, as a "writer," instead of the glamor, he limned the shade. Others had waxed eloquent upon the pleasures of New York, its wealth, fashion and allurements. He preferred to consider its pain, and endeavor to express the flood of thoughts sight of that pain inspired.

Peter realized that these writings of his were crude. Comparison with the smooth style of magazine and newspaper articles convinced him of that. But he believed his thoughts were original, and knew that constant practice would help him put them in respectable form.

Sunday came to be a day of toil. Although he knew there was a small "branch" of Noel's church in Brooklyn, the Kansan did not attend. In the first place, he dreaded the memories that such attendance would call back to him. There was a certain spiritual or psychologic potentiality about the congregations of this church that would, he knew, remind him

of Helen Dyke and the happy times spent in Petit City. This he desired to avoid.

The chief pleasures surrounding his sojourn in the East thus far were three letters from Noel; two from Nova Scotia and one from Maine. Peter had read them over many times, neglecting, however, to reply to the last. His intentions had been, and still were, good; but now that his time was occupied with writing essays he had less inclination than ever for putting thought into such ephemeral things as letters. Moreover, the missionary's address was still changing, no doubt; and mail might not reach him at all. . . .

One Sunday afternoon in May, a year since his coming to New York, the Kansan sat staring over an unfinished manuscript on his rented typewriter, musing on the singular emptiness of life these days; when a picture rose before his imagination, lifting him out of his immediate surroundings.

He thought he saw an immense crowd gathered in Madison Square Gardens, around a gaudily clad figure that gesticulated vigorously. In his fancy he moved closer, and discovered that the faces of the throng were twisted with laughter. There were well-dressed individuals, of various ages and nationalities; indeed, all sorts and conditions of men. The central figure turned out to be a quack and a juggler. He

performed all sorts of feats, dancing and grimacing fantastically. At each new move the crowd burst into another roar of laughter. Peter could hear the sound of it rumble and die away.

Suddenly the picture changed. The charlatan disappeared, as if by his own magic, and in his place rose a figure in white, with a thoughtful face. Peter thought he recognized Adam Stern; but presently he saw there were points of facial dissimilarity, though a certain general likeness remained.

The laughter gradually faded from the faces of the throng, and one by one they began to move away; some in scorn, others apparently in fear. Ere the speaker had uttered many words, all but a few ragged women and children and one man had forsaken the place.

Then a light descended upon the head of the figure in white, and stepping down from his elevation, which proved to be a rock, he gathered his few hearers about his knee, took a loaf of bread from his girdle, and began ministering to their needs. Thus the vision faded. . . .

Peter experienced the old thrill that he had known, on many occasions, in Petit City; and his soul was lost in wonder.

It occurred to him to tear up the manuscript on his typewriter and set down what had so mysteri-

ously come into his fancy; but remembering a criticism of the city editor's: that he was too imaginative to make a success of newspaper work: he decided to grind out the rest of his article and not be ruled entirely by fancyings.

Nevertheless he could not quite rid his mind of the picture. It remained with him vividly for many days. Particularly when night fell and the great metropolis blazed out in its artificial glory, did he recall the figure in Madison Park, and the actions of the crowd.

What bearing did this fancy, which Peter conceived to be true to life, have upon the evolution of mankind? Was there an element in human nature that was for ever at enmity against Truth, in one age as in another; and if so, could earthly influences alone ever eradicate it?

Did the actions of the mob for ever characterize the attitude of carnal man, in other worlds and eons past as now; and the condescension of the Figure in White typify the love and mercy of what religionists called "God"? Was there a gulf between the two that the theory of evolution might never fill?

In his heart the Kansan sympathized with the White Figure and those who hearkened to him. The grimacing rabble, with their love of tricks and folly, were despicable beyond words. They were the

worms of earth who demanded idle pleasures, depraved sensations. His soul hated them. What part of creation, he asked himself, did they represent?

His intellect referred the question to Civilization. Whose ideals were more truly represented in the present state of society: the mob's or the White Figure's?

The reporter covered several of his "runs," in fancy. He saw destitution, prostitution, damnation on every hand. Moving westward three blocks, he was confronted by the marble halls of commerce and culture: the highest representation of human achievement (according to Society's valuation).

He entered the marble halls and looked about him. The stairways were of polished white stone. From a distance they shone with artificial splendor. But moving closer he caught reflections in their surface that froze his heart. The victims of civilization lay there, mangled, crucified on the altar of human greed, mortal lust. They were ghastly. Peter shuddered and turned away.

All this work of man was the work of devils. No wonder people of sincerity clove to thought of God and believed in future punishment.

But here the Kansan halted himself. He believed he was being carried away by an attractive illusion. The conditions his vision had shown him existed,

true enough; but the religionist's was not the logical remedy. . . .

Toward the end of May, the city editor came to Peter one morning and asked him whether he would prefer being a "small toad in a big puddle or the reverse." Peter expressed surprise that so busy and practical a man as his chief should talk in riddles; but ignoring the remark the city editor went on to say that a certain small puddle called Ladner, New Jersey, was, he happened to know, in need of a "good newspaperman."

"An old college friend of mine is editor in chief of the *Evening Globe* there, and he wants some one who can do a little of his private work and learn to write editorials. Now this is a chance for you, Bosten, if you've got the literary bee very bad."

Peter was profuse in his thanks. He had not been anticipating such good fortune.

"But," he said, on second thought, "do you think I'll be able to fill the place?"

His chief waved the doubt aside.

"All you've got to do," he returned, almost impatiently, "is to avoid the use of the double negative, cross your t's and dot your i's. No one writes literature these days. Anyway, you can bluff your way through—as the rest of us do. We are a bunch of funny little egotists, the whole lot of us. Why,

haven't you heard that our religious editor can't do a thing until he's taken his tea?"

A wire was sent to the Ladner *Globe*, stating that a competent man had been found, and Peter took leave of Park Row.

He had not realized till now that he was attached to the place. The "boys" were unique characters, many of them. They considered themselves the salt of the earth; although their savor was not always healthful. Peter had never chummed with any of them; but his casual associations with them had been both pleasant and educational.

Before taking his leave he ascended to the summit of one of the down-town skyscrapers and gave Manhattan a final scrutiny.

The shining streaks of light that were streets and avenues, swarmed with life. How like insects were these creatures, "made in the image of God," as they believed! They swarmed in and out of the office buildings exactly like ants.

Peter had been sympathizing, more or less, with the religionists' viewpoint of late. His mental habit of subjecting everything to the test of incredulity made him doubt the "world" just as honestly as he doubted the "church." In Petit City he had analyzed the ways of the sincerest believers he had ever known,—with keenest scrutiny. His mind had in-

clined toward the ultra-agnostic view in the presence of excessive faith. But in New York, away from religious influences, constantly in contact with the worldly, his mental processes had been working in the direction of the opposite of worldly—the "godly."

Yet now, as he stood looking down upon this great city, almost from the clouds, and conceived of man's likeness to the creeping things of earth, his mind could not possibly compass Noel Crayne's conception of the Almighty.

Were not those insects down there but an insignificant part of the universe's evolution? Their religions, their ideals—in the sum of things, what did they matter?—any more than mattered the aspirations of the ant?

Could any reasonable man conceive of a God little enough to interfere in the individual operations of these infinitesimal beings; to take a handful of them unto himself as "chosen ones," and champion their cause against other handfuls?

The Kansan sighed, under the burden of the thought, and continued to gaze at what he could not comprehend.

CHAPTER VIII

INVOLVING AN ACTRESS

NOEL stood gazing at the theatrical announcement, without really seeing it. The performance would now be going on. Adele Cressy would be singing, in that mellow though tempestuous voice of hers, and smiling at fascinated strangers.

The missionary felt in his pocket for the few coins he knew were there, and mechanically approached the box office.

"How much are your rush seats?" he asked.

"Twenty-five cents," came the reply, accompanied by a grin.

But suddenly the face of the ticket vender turned scarlet. Obviously he recognized the "customer" and repented of his grin.

"Give me one——," Noel was saying, when interrupted.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but will you accept the compliments of the house? You are Mr. Crayne, are you not? I have heard you preach."

It was Noel's turn to blush.

"Thank you," he said; and being unable to make any more comprehensive remark, added: "very much." After which it seemed to him the only thing

to do was to enter the theater; and that is what he did, without further hesitation.

He was shown to a seat on the left aisle in the second row of the orchestra. "The Prince of Pilsen" was playing. He had come in just before the "Violets" song.

A moment after he took his seat action was cleared for that duet, and the love scene surrounding it; and a vision appeared that made his heart thump absurdly.

Noel did not see the "juvenile lead" at all. The light baritone might just as well have been back in one of the property trunks, for all he mattered to the Missourian. Noel's eyes were fixed on Adele—sadly "made up," but still Adele—and he was hoping she would not see him. Why had that box-office man recognized him? The gallery would have been a much safer place than down here.

The stage lover came into existence for Noel on the second line of his song. Unquestionably he had a good voice, and was singing, too, with reasonable expression. He almost seemed to mean it.

However he did not hold the missionary longer than a minute, in spite of his powers. Adele Cressy, a girl who had learned to sing in prayer meetings, was there on the stage. She was being featured on the bill as having won music-hall fame in a few

months. The audience was waiting for her to answer the baritone-tenor.

As part of the "business" of the scene, Adele had to move upstage between the verse of her "answer" and the chorus. It was while doing this, her tones still ringing in Noel's ears, that she saw him.

He was glad recognition had not come in the middle of the verse, for Adele was evidently affected by sight of him. Why she should bite her lips thus and clench her little hands was more or less of a mystery to him. A second later, of course, she smiled: and then "took" the refrain as a solo.

While their eyes were still in communication she began the "Message of the Violet," in a voice sufficiently unsteady to be convincing; and while the legitimate "business" of her act required that she sing to the stage lover, Adele took liberties: and Noel Crayne knew to whom she was singing.

He could feel the perspiration stand out on his palms as the significance of her tones reached him. The glances she stole from her make-believe lover and bestowed upon the real one, burned into the Missourian's heart as nothing human had ever done.

The chorus was simple; over-"popular" in fact; but there was a certain natural beauty about it that "held." And when Adele ascended to a third repetition of the phrase that burdens so many songs, "I

love you," putting all the charm of her voice and personality into it, the effect was unquestionably thrilling.

A great uproar of applause came down upon her, but she only "took" one curtain call. Nor did anyone in the house, except the Missourian, know why. An usher handed him a note from her, entreating him to come back behind the scenes at once.

As he cared nothing for the performance itself and was just as eager to see Adele as she was to see him, he followed the usher out, and was directed to the stage door, down an alley.

The doorkeeper "passed him" with a grunt, and he found himself in the most dismal place imaginable. It reminded him of an old granary in which he had played, on his uncle's farm, as a boy.

One of the chorus girls found him wandering along a blind passage in search of the Star, and kindly showed him the direction to go (showering his black coat with powder, in the act).

He rapped at a door on which was pasted a gilded star, but was not told to enter. Light steps approached, from within, the door opened suddenly, and before he knew it he had been kissed (and again daubed with talcum).

She drew him inside and sat down with her arm about him, in the manner of actresses. Yet, strange

to relate, Noel was not shocked. The environment seemed to demand some such welcome. Besides, the genuine light of happiness and friendship in Adele's shining eyes dissipated all superficial impressions.

There seemed to be so much to say, and time was so limited, that they satisfied themselves, for the moment, with casual remarks. Adele had made her change of costume and dismissed her maid, but was expecting to be "called" any moment.

"Don't you dare to leave this dressing room," she said, hearing the expected call, "until I come back. And make up your mind right now that we are going to have dinner together after the show."

With that she disappeared, leaving Noel to his thoughts. These, however, were a sorry jumble. Jessie Kirkton, the Jacobses, the box-office man, Adele, an usher, and the "message of the violets" formed innumerable and impossible combinations in his brain. Moreover, this dressing room added its distractions. He saw before him uncounted devices for improving on nature and tickling the fancy of man. Here he came to a halt, wondering how many admirers Adele had. Did she kiss them all, as she had him? If Jessie knew about this unconventionality what would she think?

But at this point Billy Moore came on the scene (Noel was already thinking in stage terms), and

sang a song to the bishop's niece. Perhaps at this very moment he was doing so, in reality. It might be nothing more dangerous than an anthem (some of which, Noel reflected with a grin, were dangerous enough to the reason) ; but even so, it would be ac-accompanied by sympathetic looks: and in turning the page their hands might come in contact.

Alas! these were the thoughts that played upon the surface of the missionary's mind. But who of us, however holy, can justly criticize him? Have we not, in spite of our ideals, been swept along in the tide of our desires, sometimes even into the rapids—and beyond?

The thing we call Love, imperfectly known to us as it is, dominates our lives at times against the influence of all the noble faculties; bearing us onward first in our fancies and then in reality. It changes its face until we can not recognize it, and we mistake the illusion for the fact. It contradicts itself, makes hypocrites and fools of us often when we are most sincere; and brings perhaps as much pain as pleasure, on the whole.

One of the forms this mortal passion takes is jealousy: with which the Missourian was even now, unconsciously indeed, having trouble. His regard for Jessie, of whatever nature it was, had been at

least temporarily altered by the message he had received from a Petit City gossip.

This may seem unworthy of a hero of romance, particularly of a religious romance; but perhaps the author had better declare, at this juncture, that he is writing about men, not angels.

Noel's love for Jessie was, when all is told, merely human. All that pertains to this mortal body is necessarily human. It may have been, and doubtless was, above the average affection; but for all that, it was somewhat faltering in its development, and not impervious at this stage, to influences that sway all lovers, of every degree.

He was and always had been aware of a certain attachment between Jessie and Billy Moore. That it was not equal to her love for him, Noel devoutly believed. But it was only natural that he should accuse himself of egotism in this regard occasionally. Truer lovers than he had deceived themselves before now.

Thought of his religion moderated his doubts, of course. But, in the last analysis, was he positive that this attachment had the divine sanction? Might not he, and other members of the church, claim too much of a monopoly of God's favor—as Peter Bosten had often hinted? Who was he, Noel Crayne, that the Lord should make a pet of him?

The question was repeating itself in his mind when Adele came back from the footlights.

"Now I've another precious minute," she declared, coming close to him again. "Dear old fellow," she cried, in the next breath, "I can't seem to get used to you!"

He returned the pressure of her hands, and was aware that in so doing he both received and imparted pleasure.

"In spite of your make-up, Adele," he answered, "you look great."

He was the only man she knew who used that little adjective with any significance; but she did not tell him so now.

"You will have to step outside a moment," she said, "while I make a change. Drop in on Mr. Clear, across the hall, number four, and make yourself acquainted. Come back in five minutes."

Noel did as commanded, and found that Mr. Clear was the baritone-tenor. The Missourian congratulated him on his singing, after saying that Miss Cressy had sent him; and the actor was obviously pleased. Noel had heard that musical-comedy artists never tired of praise. He thought it probable in Clear's case, anyway.

"So you're an old friend of Adele's, eh?" said the

actor, a trifle patronizingly. "Well, that makes you my friend too."

Mr. Clear went on to say what a wonderful girl she was. He conveyed the impression, too, that no man "in the business" had succeeded in making much headway in her affections except himself (Clear). At which remark the Missourian took secret offense, for some psychologic reason.

"How do you like him?" Adele asked, when he returned.

"Not much," said Noel, with true Western frankness.

Adele laughed, oddly.

"You always were hard to please, Noel."

She accompanied the assertion with a half-bashful glance that carried the missionary back to old scenes, and seemed decidedly out of harmony with her false complexion.

When leaving him this time she gave him some photographs of herself for his entertainment, and when she came back he had made a rough sketch of one of them, which she detected him trying to conceal in his coat.

"Oh do give it to me," she coaxed. "You can have the original if you like. I don't mean myself," she laughed apologetically, giving him a shy look.

He was putting a finishing touch to the sketch.

"It's too crude, Adele," he said, glancing from the paper to her face. "Both the photograph and the sketch are bad."

While she was scrutinizing the latter, he began: "Do you remember——?" But she interrupted:

"No—you mustn't use up any of our pleasure in advance, Noel. Save it for dinner to-night—and the other nights."

His rumbling bass reverberated for the first time during the evening.

"You're the same girl," he said, looking at her admiringly. "I can't associate you permanently with this place and the theatrical profession."

"Can you imagine me earning three hundred a week?" she asked, smiling at the effect of her question.

The next moment she was gone, and the missionary was multiplying his mother's monthly allowance by fifteen to make it equal Adele's salary for one week. Not that the money meant anything to him: but he always liked working at puzzles.

He looked at his watch. By now the business meeting would be out, most likely. And how had it terminated, he wondered?

Noel did not doubt that T. T. Jacobs and Company had been cried down; but he was curious to know what liberties had been taken with his character in

his absence. That there were petty jealousies against him in the branch he was aware. These had been a thorn in his flesh. But that they would manifest themselves to any extent in the present situation he could not imagine.

The performance over, Mr. Clear approached Adele's dressing room, passing the Missourian in the corridor without appearing to notice him, and entered unannounced. But a second later he came out again and went away muttering something about "fastidious people." Adele explained to her old friend that theatrical men were hard to endure and harder to educate. Noel observed the heightened color with which she said it, but did not ask any questions.

As they walked up the alley, Adele holding him by the arm, the Missourian was conscious of subtle pleasure and a peculiar sense of pride. He wondered if the well-dressed throng in front of the theater would recognize the leading lady and envy her escort.

Adele hailed a taxi, (the while Noel secretly felt in his vest pocket for a bank note that had once been there), and gave the driver the name of a popular cafe, "Henley's."

Noel was experiencing sensations similar to those Peter Bosten had felt on first coming to Petit City. There would be a rent in the magic web, by and by,

and the dream would come to an end, leaving bare walls, darkness and a hard pillow behind.

"I suppose," remarked the actress, as they sped down Ladner's white way, "if your congregation ever saw you doing this there would be trouble."

"Who told you I had a congregation, Adele?"

"I forget. Some one informed me several months ago that you were out in the field"—he noted with pleasure that she still used church terminology—"but I thought it was down East. Of course when I saw you at the theater, in your black suit, I concluded you were doing pastor's work here. That, after all, is the work, it seems to me, for which you would be best fitted."

In the back of his brain Noel was thinking of the failure he had made, or thought he had made. But foremost in his mind was the girl beside him, whom he had heard pray and sing many times in prayer meeting.

Unable to readily form a reply that would represent his thoughts, he allowed a brief silence to ensue; the while the actress studied him from the corner of her eye.

"I am pastor here, temporarily," he said, presently; "but it's a hard task, Adele; I feel unfit for it. Only to-night they were having a business meeting in which I was being asked to resign: when I got up

and left. That is how I happened to stray toward the theater. I hadn't noticed your name in the newspaper advertisements and knew nothing about your connection with the Pilsen company. It was blind chance that led me to you."

"And yet—was it, Noel?" she returned, quickly. "You never used to believe much in chance. Have you, like me, changed?"

"Sometimes I ask myself that question, Adele. But as for you, I think you are just as good as ever. There is honesty in your eye and sincerity in your voice, as there always was in spite of—" He hesitated. "In spite of your love of pleasure," he finished.

She pressed his hand and there was a pause.

"This trouble of yours," she said, by and by,—"who wanted you to resign? Do you want me to guess?"

He nodded.

"The Jacobs crowd," came the answer, in stage slang.

"How did you guess, Adele?"

But they were at the cafe.

Noel was not quite sure how to proceed. However, the first thing he did was to open the taxi door; and his second act was to reach for the worn bill in his vest pocket. Adele was quick to detect the

movement, and forestalled his recklessness through the speaking tube.

As they entered the cafe she reminded him that he was a missionary and she a prosperous actress.

"If you attempt to pay anything," she declared, "I will take it as an offense."

He believed her, too.

It was half-past eleven when their soup arrived. Noel glanced at his watch and Adele at him.

"This is one night you forget the demands of duty," she warned. "Noel, I am going to talk you ill. Your head will be nodding hours before I am through with you."

He gazed about the place, a moment, as any novice might; the while Adele, to whom the glamor of life was already beginning to lose its charm, secretly studied his profile.

By and by she began the conversation where they had left off.

"You asked me how I knew it was the Jacobses who opposed you, Noel. I'll tell you. . . . It is an old habit of theirs. They cater to themselves and want everybody else to do it. I know I am a frivolous creature myself; I love nice things; I even like to be flattered. But, Noel, I don't think I am a hypocrite.

"A few months ago, Arthur Jacobs was in a town where our show was playing. Learning that I was,

or had been"—she dropped her eyes under his gaze —"a member of the church, he looked me up; made a dreadful fuss over me; wanted me to make their home mine when I came to town. To-day, at my hotel, I received two telegrams, a telephone call and a personal caller—none of which I paid any attention to. Arthur was the caller, and he went away angry.

"My own cousin—Jack Delton—you know him—he's in the southwestern field now—had an experience with these people. They tried to rule him, and he preached right at them from the pulpit one Sunday. Oh, how they rose up and devoured things!

"But, Noel, don't you let them have their way. You should have stayed at the business meeting tonight and fought it out."

He smiled at her earnestness. It was good to know that the church and the tribulations of its followers still interested her.

"I am not a fighter, Adele," he replied. "But come now, tell me all about yourself. Leave me out of the conversation. I am in a mood to forget myself tonight. Besides, I want to know something about your profession, and the great strides you have made in it."

She gave him a brief synopsis of her short career, but he could not induce her to prolong the subject.

Reflecting, then, that it might be better for her to hear an account of his missionary experiences than to recite worldly things, he consented to speak again of himself.

While he was attempting to describe the vicissitudes incidental to his unique labors in Nova Scotia and Maine, and while the actress was holding back a real tear, a tall, slim young man entered "Henley's" and was shown to a table within a few yards of Adele's, but partially hidden from it behind a large palm.

The newcomer was a newspaperman, recently come to town, who had dropped in to test the reputation of this famous Ladner resort, and incidentally to drive away the fatigue occasioned by his first editorial for the *Evening Globe*.

Peter had no more than got seated when he caught sight of two familiar faces, one more familiar than the other.

Now, probably some persons would have acted differently; but being only himself, Peter tipped the waiter and stole out of the place, without having tasted anything to eat. Once outside, he flattened his nose against a pane of glass and gazed long and bewilderedly at what, to him, was a miracle.

CHAPTER IX

LIFE'S STAGE

As HE turned away from the cafe window Peter was thinking neither of his recent editorial nor the fatigue it had left. He walked home to his room, a distance of more than ten blocks, shaking his head many times en route, pondering over the mystery he had seen.

The Kansan had been in town only two days, which accounts for his ignorance of Noel's pastorship and the wild idea he was now cherishing that the Missourian had quit preaching up in Maine to join Adele Cressy, perhaps marry her. Such things had happened before now. Peter had even known parsons to run off with other men's wives.

"But Noel is no ordinary preacher," he soliloquized, "let alone something less."

Peter recalled his conversation with the Missourian of more than a year ago, wherein the latter had confessed his infatuation for Adele; and found himself trying to trace the stages of the passion's development up to the present. He was aware, in doing so, of a contradiction somewhere in his own philosophy.

That the miracle he had witnessed in the cafe was

disappointing to him—nay, more than that—he was obliged to concede. But why? If Noel, and all other religionists, were pursuing an illusion in their faith, did not a surrender of the same bring them nearer to Truth? And if the affairs of the world and the universe were directed according to the laws of evolution, where was there any ill significance in the attachment of a clean young man for a charming professional singer?

"But there's Jessie," the Kansan answered himself.

"Yes," Reason returned, "but his attachment for her is a spiritual thing and depends on his religious scruples. He believes their lives jointly will be of greater service to God than separately, or than a union between himself and a girl like Adele Cressy. Now, if this faith is misplaced, as you believe his faith in God to be,—why see anything foreboding in his present conduct?"

But try as he might to be logical in this matter, Peter *felt* a pang of disappointment in his breast at thought of the psychologic change in Noel. Somehow, it boded ill; proclaimed that there was nothing sure on earth.

The thinker retired with his reflections, resolving, as he turned off the lights, that he would call on the

actress next day and ascertain exactly what had happened before looking Noel up.

At the same moment Adele was asking her companion if he would prefer tea to the coffee he had left untouched.

"No, thank you," he replied; but did not remind her that their church believed all manner of stimulants were harmful. She did not have to be reminded, however.

"Noel," she said, tenderness creeping into her tone, "I don't believe there is another like you in the world."

With that he grinned and raising his coffee-cup swallowed a generous mouthful. The action so amused Adele that she was several minutes regaining possession of herself. Nor did the missionary stop at one sup. He drank all the coffee and declared that "Henley's" sure knew how to make it.

The explanation of his conduct was soon forthcoming.

"Adele," he observed, thoughtfully, "I am weary of being considered halo-browed. It makes my task so much harder. Let you and me be perfectly honest with each other, we are old friends, and it will be such a relief. Your inviting me here to-night has done wonders for me. Among other things it has demonstrated what a noble, understanding thing

true friendship is. With you I know it is not my calling that enlists interest. You know, there are cloth-worshipers in this church as in every other; and if a minister happens to show himself human once in a while, he is immediately consigned to perdition.

"But with people like you, Adele,—well, I like you. Your presence does me a world of good—far more than mine can possibly do you. So forget that I'm a preacher, like a dear girl, and let us be jolly this week."

The girl's eyes glowed and color mantled her cheeks. Here was a side of Noel's character that she had never clearly glimpsed before. It revealed him in a more alluring light than ever.

But in the height of her pleasure there came a chill —with thought of Jessie Kirkton. Was the missionary still true to her?

The answer seemed obvious to Adele. Noel might have innocent reactions like this from the side of perfection, but fundamentally he was unchangeable. Yet, discouraging as the reflection was, Adele determined to make one supreme effort to win more than his friendship. She felt that she had temporary advantage of him, and of Jessie; which advantage she must make use of to the full extent. That her plan involved the defeat of another girl's love was a mis-

take of life's—not hers. She loved Noel Crayne as truly as any woman could, and determined to make him reciprocate the affection if possible.

Had the actress known how much circumstances were in her favor she would have been encouraged. Had she realized, for instance, that his heart was undergoing stinging emotions, in which love for Jessie Kirkton was not the predominant factor; and known just how human he really was, beneath his black coat, Adele would have played her game more confidently —and perhaps less effectively.

"Why, Noel," she smiled, "if you don't look out you'll force me to write home about you!"

"I expect Brother Jacobs has done that already," he replied. "But now Adele," he changed the subject abruptly, "if we are to chum this week, I can't have you spending money. You know the state of my own finances, I suppose: and as I can not keep up my end of it, you'll have to submit to the simple life for a few days. We can go through the parks and so on."

She nodded approvingly, her mind busy on the formulation of a question for which she had been in search of an occasion.

"How ever will you manage to live on your missionary's allowance when you're married, Noel?" She spoke with well-assumed indifference.

After a pause he answered, with an unconscious sigh: "That's probably a long way off." He was thinking of the possibility of Billy Moore's proving the more acceptable. And although the thought carried a sigh in its wake, Noel was not aware of any acute suffering. Adele Cressy's presence had always had an obliterating effect upon his troubles.

"You speak forlornly," she smiled. "I hope nothing has happened?"

In his present mood he did not care to mention Jessie. In truth, he wanted to mentally neglect her a little as a punishment of her continued regard for a rival.

"You keep talking about me," he answered, evasively, "although I have warned you against it!"

Might not something have happened between them after all, Adele mused? Did not his actions to-night imply as much?

Alas for the perspicacity of women!

The actress conceived another illuminating idea. She would diagnose him for possible sentiments toward herself. And a memory aided her here. She recalled a church picnic, three years past, where he had stumbled upon her and one Donald Graham, walking arm in arm through the woods. The expression of his face had been singularly like that of a man's who glimpses the green-eyed monster.

Why a young man who had no right (though he might have obtained it) and apparently no desire to dictate to her strolls, should betray such interest, had been considerable of a marvel to her at the time; but now she might profit by that observation.

"What was it about Mr. Clear," she asked, nonchalantly, "that you didn't like, Noel?"

He glanced at her interrogatively, with a suddenness that delighted her.

"I don't know," came his answer slowly. "The usual trouble with men—and women too for that matter. Lack of seriousness in life; love of the superficial—including self."

"Splendid!" she cried, softly. "But Noel," her tone changed slightly, "don't you realize that you have also described me?"

He smiled reassuringly.

"I have always thought, Adele, that there was more to you than is seen on the surface, even though you do love pleasure."

Her eyes fell, not in affectation, either. Gradually they returned to the level of his gaze.

"Noel, don't you think that Mr. Clear is just about the type for me? Remember, you wanted us to be honest with each other to-night."

The missionary's countenance clouded slightly. The shadow of a frown appeared, and the eyes took

on a new expression. These signs were not lost on the actress.

"Indeed I don't," he replied readily, emphatically. "While I've never been able to find a man—" The speaker came to a halt, as if struck by an idea. "By the way, Adele," he went on, thoughtfully, "you remember Peter Bosten?"

She smiled, so apparent was the trend of his thoughts to her.

"He's the man for me, eh?"

The Missourian was obliged to chuckle, in his thunderous bass.

"Seriously, though, from what you knew of him, didn't he strike you as being a fine fellow?"

"Yes," she admitted. "But there was no—" She hesitated. "—No physical appeal."

Their eyes communicated. There was a momentary silence.

"Now in the case of Mr. Clear," she went on, presently, observing the shadow on her companion's face again, "there *is*."

The missionary looked into his coffee cup.

"That seems to me," he observed, "to be one of the best proofs of my contention. These physical attachments strike me as being the cause of great trouble. The spiritual marriage is the nobler kind, don't you think so?"

She shook her head decisively, and a wisp of hair loosed itself from a fold over her ear.

"Indeed I do not, Noel."

He had hit upon the very subject she wanted him to touch.

"These spiritual marriages are not necessarily ideal. They seem cold and unnatural to me. Is not marriage, after all, a decidedly physical thing? Children—are they not physical? Hasn't the Maker given us passions, compelling us to do his will by them? Can you or I say these impulses are carnal or ugly?"

He was astounded both at what she said and at the fact that is was Adele who said it.

"If you want to find an ideal marriage, Noel," she went on, realizing that she had made an impression on him, "look to the one where there are heartbeats, blushes, even jealousies; where the girl cries for love of him, and he wants to fight for her."

The missionary caught a vagrant tear in her eye, and could feel the blood running into his cheeks. In a few simple sentences she had betrayed her own love and at the same time pictured to him the affection he had been crying down for years.

With feminine tact she closed the matter abruptly, and with a glance at her watch smilingly remarked that it was time for them to go.

Again she called a taxi, and although he begged her to let him walk home, insisted on driving around that way with him. But she did not allow him to return to their conversation on love. That was something he must think over for himself. Adele had a week before her; and the game she played must not be forced. The stakes were too high. She would use all the arts at her command.

The good "sister," at whose house the missionary resided, was at all times a light sleeper. To-night, having been to business meeting, and knowing that Brother Crayne had not yet come home, she lay awake fretting. Consequently when the taxi drove up she heard it, and was so sorely tempted to peek out the front window that she did so.

There, was a finely dressed lady leaning out of an automobile, bidding the missionary good-night. Good-night!—why, it was almost three o'clock in the morning! Had not the clock struck two, long ago?

The good sister, of course, could scarcely believe her eyes. And he so young!

Before getting back into bed she prayed for him, and asked the Almighty to "reward Brother Jacobs according to his works." The reward she was thinking of, as she prayed, was the loss of property and a certain amount of pride.

Noel felt that he ought to lie awake and medi-

tate awhile, but he was so sleepy the "penance" was a physical impossibility. For his was not a medieval conscience, frightened with all manner of hobgoblins, given to extreme fantasies. It was the conscience that goes with a clear brain, an honest heart, and a healthy constitution.

The little qualm that suggested expiatory meditation was satisfied with a sincere prayer for his own salvation, Adele Cressy's, and all the world's. He sank to sleep with a comfortable feeling that he had made a girl happier, and perhaps a trifle better, by asserting his own individuality. Also, he looked forward with pleasure to the morrow and several days thereafter, hoping opportunities of assisting to make Adele less worldly would present themselves.

Below all his reflections, of course, revolved her argument about love, and it continued to cause a surging of emotions that were resistless, in his present state of mind.

When Peter Bosten reported at the office next morning he was instructed to catch the nine-twenty train for Philadelphia, where an important strike had just occurred.

"How long do you think it will last?" he asked the editor, thinking of Noel Crayne and the actress.

"Probably only a few days—maybe not that."

So, knowing the "Prince of Pilsen" would be in town all week, and feeling certain that he should be back before Saturday, Peter went off without even telephoning the Frolic Theater for the name of Miss Cressy's hotel.

The missionary met with a chilly reception at breakfast which he was at a loss to understand. He wanted to ask how the business meeting had turned out, but on second thought deemed it advisable to ignore that proceeding as unworthy of notice. It was only natural that a man should withdraw from such a session; and, anyway, Noel was not the kind that recognizes human masters. Before breakfast was finished he had ascended to a dignified mien himself.

He had an appointment with Adele for the afternoon. They were going for a stroll in the park.

"Sister Bolton," he asked, with apparent innocence, "where do you transfer to reach the farthest entrance to Elm Grove Park?"

Screwing her mouth up comically she made reply; and, the ice having been broken, asked him if he had heard the outcome of the business meeting. No, he had not. Had she?

"I left before it was finished," she said, "but I heard this morning, over the telephone, that they had a terrible time. Brother Jacobs disgraced him-

self; his wife came to tears; Albert declared he would never set foot in the church again; and there was no end of trouble."

"What did they do with me?" asked the missionary, a smile beginning to appear around his mouth.

"I think, Brother Crayne, they appointed a committee to call on you—seeing that you did not remain at the church."

She accompanied the last clause with a significant look, one that nettled the Missourian.

"And what do you imagine," he asked, "this committee will suggest?"

Her manner indicated that she would prefer not to answer this question. But Noel's face became so stern she finally decided it would be better to use perfect frankness with him.

"Well, Brother Crayne," she replied, looking at her plate, "there is a general feeling, I believe, that one so young as you is inclined to be rather harsh—unintentionally so."

"I see," he returned, calmly. "I don't suppose," he went on, after a pause, "you have any idea who first suggested the committee?"

Then he was informed that it had been done at the instigation of Brother Jacobs, and concurred in by the branch for the sake of keeping "peace in the family."

"Well," said the missionary, with a flash of fire in his eye, "if they think it right to compromise with dishonesty in order to 'keep peace in the family,' as you say, they may have the peace—that kind—and let *me* go."

At this the good sister's manner completely changed, and she begged him to be reasonable.

"Reasonable? Where am I unreasonable in refusing to be ruled by pride and selfishness, Sister Bolton? Do you expect me to sacrifice principle to the whims of a haughty family? That is not in harmony with the ideals of the gospel. I must speak the truth in my sermons, no matter whom it strikes. I had no one in particular in mind when I spoke on hypocrisy, a few weeks ago; and no man or series of men in this branch will force me to apologize, in word or action, for a wrong I have not committed. Such an act on my part would itself constitute hypocrisy. If they don't want my sincerity in this branch they can't have *me*."

He ended with all the emphasis of which his bass voice was capable, and "Sister Bolton" was silenced.

The Missourian wanted to go out and walk off his anger, for he *was* angry; but reflecting that the committee might possibly wait upon him during the morning, he stayed in.

Being unable to study, however, and wishing to

forget the matter that was on his mind, he picked up the photograph Adele had given him in the dressing room of the theater and proceeded to make a pen-and-ink sketch of it.

The voice of discretion had suggested his room for a task of this nature; but the hypocrisy of it disgusted him, and with admirable stubbornness he sat in the living room of his boarding house, where the landlady could not help but observe his operations, and began portraying the beauty of an actress.

CHAPTER X

COMEDY AND DRAMA

THERE may be need to apologize for Noel's actions, during this brief test-period in his life. If so, let the phrase "weakness of humanity" suffice. It is very expressive, though trite.

When it is considered that the Missourian had been away from loved ones more than a year now, and had sacrificed the privilege of attending General Conference in April, because of financial stringency in the church—his natural desire for a short week of diversion, with an old friend may be viewed in a charitable light.

He was not conscious of infidelity to Jessie in his associations with Adele. That they were engaged was no reason for blindness upon the part of either. Neither of them claimed to be infallible; and while they believed "the way would be opened up" for their marriage, yet they must not set themselves up as arbiters of destiny. Under God's guidance, all men had their free agency, and were in duty bound to use what intelligence they possessed—in love matters as in all others.

There were many mysteries in this universe. Possibly, as Peter Bosten believed, religious people were

too confident of their comprehension. Faith did not imply knowledge.

"There may," reflected the missionary, "be eternal truth in what Adele said to me in the cafe. I may have a misconception of true love: I am merely a youngster yet. How do I know but that God arranged that business meeting and my interview with Adele? He may be leading me to her for both our sakes; and has given Jessie another affection in his mercy."

So mused the Missourian after his second pleasure excursion with the actress. Adele had been pensive, even a little sad; and her manner had strongly appealed to him. They were to meet again on Wednesday.

Noel desired, above all things on earth, to do the right. He wanted to have perfect faith in God and the ultimate good. But, especially since knowing Peter Bosten, he realized that reason was a faculty that must not be ignored. He frankly admitted to himself that there were individuals in the church who professed a species of faith that he would not care to possess. It was the kind that bred fanatics, it seemed to him; attached abnormal importance to the "spiritual gifts," and too often neglected practical Christianity.

He knew, too, that faith was to some extent a

matter of education. The heathen idol-worshiper had faith. He believed in the immortality of a pile of stone, in the healing power of incantations and many other impossibilities. And so strong was this faith of his that often he would surrender life for it.

There could be no disputing the sincerity of such belief. But the righteousness of it—that was another matter. And this lay in the believer's *conception.*

Noel remembered the agnostic Peter's argument on Reason: that it was anterior to faith; that without it faith could not be possible. As a matter of fact, it *was* possible. But what kind of faith?—the heathen's! Yet, did not the heathen have a "reason for the hope that was within him?" Undoubtedly. Therefore, the determining factor must lie in *quality.*

The word was an inspiration to Noel. It, and the thought involved, came to him from the realm of Truth, it seemed.

Reason, faith, goodness—it was the quality of them that determined their value, their truth. But what was "quality"; how was it ascertained and applied?

Noel was suddenly aware that he had reached the bounds of mental comprehension. Here was something that he could not grasp and put into words. He could only *recognize* it. But recognition involved

a certain *quality* of vision! Here again was the elusive element of "quality."

It was a thing of the soul, he decided, conclusively. Something to be *felt*, but which could not be communicated. It was, in the last analysis, "spiritual discernment."

While following this train of thought, the missionary recalled innumerable passages of scripture bearing out his conclusion; a conclusion, after all, which uncounted thinkers and believers had reached before he was born. And, while musing that never before had the spiritual nature of faith so impressed itself upon him, Noel was aware of a desire to communicate the process of thought, immediately responsible for this illumination, to his skeptical friend Peter. Peter would scarcely be convinced of the *necessity* of this spiritual perception; but he would doubtless say something relevant that would benefit both of them.

Noel had drifted away from the reflection that had started his mental argument on faith, but now found his way back to it, by degrees.

The passion he had for Adele Cressy might be noble; nay, there might be the hand of God in it. This, however, faith could not determine. He must reason it out, praying for guidance.

But the moment he began to reason he ran against

what seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle. His life work.

That Adele would be content with the allowance of a missionary's wife was incomprehensible to him. It took a high-minded girl to contemplate with serenity a life of poverty and uncertainty. Would Adele ever be able to do so?

Noel sighed as the answer came to him. Adele was by nature a lover of finery and pleasure—. But the missionary came to a halt. Who was he that he should doubt the power of the gospel to save from worldly allurements? Was the "plan of salvation" so weak a thing that a girl's vanity might set it aside?

Thus he floundered, working on another pen-and-ink sketch of Adele the while,—when his landlady announced that the church committee had arrived and would be pleased to interview him.

With youthful perversity Noel leaned the sketch against a vase, scorning to conceal an innocent thing, and received his interlocutors.

There were three of them; two of whom the missionary recognized as habitual apologists for compromise, not to say Brother Jacobs, and the third a good-natured man, Brother Simpson, a veritable pacifist among religionists.

Robert Wade, a deacon in the branch, opened the

matter; his right-hand-man, Brother Carswell, drawing a ludicrously long face the while. Brother Simpson seemed a trifle embarrassed. Noel listened to what the deacon had to say, calmly at first, but with heightened color by and by.

"For you know, brethren," Mr. Wade concluded, "it is our duty to show ourselves the humblest of all people, and guard against doing anything that would serve as a stumblingblock for our fellow servants."

This was about as specific as the brother became; and when Noel drew a long breath, preparatory to replying, he could scarcely repress a smile.

"Now look here, brethren," he began, and his tone was free from the tragic element that sounded so absurd in the deacon's, "let us come to the point. Is this committee to make its report back to the branch?"

There was a wavering affirmative.

"Very well, then. What would you prefer to report?"

After beating about the bush awhile Brother Wade managed to convey the information that an apology would be most satisfactory.

"An apology for what?" asked the Missourian mercilessly.

There was further hesitation; but by degrees the

question was answered as the propounder knew it would be.

"Then," he returned, quickly, "go back and tell them that I will not apologize. When do you report?"

"To-night, after prayer meeting," said the pacifist, glad of an opportunity of doing something toward the discharge of his unpleasant duty.

Noel rose, as a sign that he was through with the affair; but Brother Carswell, whose eyes had been wandering frequently to the actress sketch to his right, suddenly showed alarm; and begged the pastor to resume his seat.

"There is another little matter I feel it my duty to bring to your attention," he remarked.

Noel sat down and looked the speaker (when it was possible) in the eye.

"Before coming here this afternoon, Brother Crayne, a member of the branch called me up and informed me that a friend of hers, who does not belong to the church but who has heard you speak and knows you on the street, had the pleasure, as the sister put it, of giving you a pass to a certain entertainment, the character of which—."

Brother Carswell lost courage at this juncture, owing to the luster of the Missourian's eye, and came to a full stop.

"Don't sidetrack the issue further," said Noel, in tones that were half defiant, half pitying. "I thoroughly understand your visit."

He gulped, as though swallowing something very distasteful to him, and the expression of his features was such that it might be said he "made a face." Then he continued.

"Do you three gentlemen"—he did not call them "brethren" this time—"consider yourselves competent, from the standpoint of knowledge and spirituality, to undertake such an important mission as that of excusing and perpetuating the pride of a hypocrite?"

The relevance of the remark seemed not quite apparent to them, but they finally managed to grasp its meaning. And realizing that the pastor was unswerving in his determination to stand his ground, the deacon resorted to a last means of coercing him.

"You will understand, Brother Crayne," he began, "that I do not wish to implicate anyone else in this little unpleasantness." He glanced toward the kitchen. "But for the sake of convincing you that we can all afford to be, hem! charitable, I may say that for our missionaries to ride around late at night in a taxi, is a very bad example for the young of the——"

The Missourian rose abruptly. "I shall report to

the minister in charge to-night," he said, "by letter."

With that he turned and left them to console each other. Did he slam the door of the living room as he went out of the house?

Disgusted with the fruits of his efforts, and feeling, somehow, that he must not go away empty-handed, Brother Wade seized the pen-and-ink sketch of Adele Cressy, and bore it off with him. It was, to say the least, proof that the pastor frittered away his time on worldly pursuits, and would be a nice item of evidence against him in case of a church court.

Half an hour later Noel returned to the house and walked directly to the little writing table in the living room. Obviously he had come back for the sketch.

Being in an uncompromising frame of mind he subjected the landlady to a mild form of inquisition; at last compelling her to admit that she had not seen the deacon take the sketch but had heard him make a remark in leaving that indicated he had it in his possession.

When he learned this the Missourian was glad he had dealt arbitrarily with the committee. There was no staying in this branch after such contemptible work.

Noel sat down and wrote a letter to the minister in

charge, resigning the temporary pastorship of Ladner; then set out for the Quincy Hotel, where Adele Cressy was staying.

"I'll go back among strangers," he told her, "where I can preach the simple message of salvation unhampered by the egotism of backsliding members. Pastoral work is too much for me, Adele. Perhaps I am too inexperienced; I don't know." After a short pause he added: "Sometimes I think it was a mistake for me to enter the field at all."

She sought his gaze, with eyes that gave him a glimpse of the fires that burned beneath. They were sitting beside each other in a private parlor of her hotel.

"Noel," she asked, with an earnestness of manner that carried force, "do you believe in the kind of love that aches eternally, and never seems to bring anything but suffering, disappointment?"

What had this to do with the matter of which he had been speaking? He gave her a puzzled look; but immediately this expression faded, and a deep glow betrayed his understanding.

"Do you think," she went on, "that it is sincere, or would you prefer the more ethereal kind that *worships*, forgetting its moderate pangs, most of the time, in religion and other things?"

Now, the Missourian was of an artistic nature, and

had, in abundance, what is called "temperament." It was impossible for him to stoically, or even philosophically, survey suffering of any kind.

Suffering is what he saw in Adele's expression; the bitterness of an unwelcome affection. The sight aroused his pity, but it did more than that; it spurred him on to a confession that had many a time almost escaped him.

Impulsively he took her hands in his, an act which had the effect of weakening her powers of resistance; and drawing her slightly toward him, spoke frankly of his feelings regarding her; also, of the accompanying fear.

Before they quite realized their situation, impelled as they were by natural forces, they were making mutual confessions of regard, he confusedly, she convincingly.

"Oh, Noel," she said, putting a note in her voice that compelled his sympathy, "you can't understand it, fully, wonderful as you are! It is almost a physical agony. There are times when I can feel my heart literally pain."

Her words humbled him. This was not a conventional thing for a woman to do; but Noel was not wedded to conventionality. Adele's confession was something sacred. It carried a potentiality, nevertheless, that stirred him deeply.

"You do not need to speak your opinion of me, Noel," she continued. "I know your thoughts. You consider me worldly, vain, superficial." He made a sober gesture of disagreement, but she ignored it. "Perhaps you are right; but then you may, to some extent, be wronging me. I admit that I love beautiful things, and can not delve into religion as some people can. But my heart is right, and I have more determination than some of your goody people.

"My love may seem physical to you. You may not be able to idolize me. But I flatter myself that I know most men better than they know themselves; and perhaps I know something of your nature that is a mystery to yourself. Did that ever strike you, Noel?

"Doubtless you imagine you could be for ever happy with Jessie Kirkton? We both are thinking of her, so why not speak of her? But Noel, dear, I sincerely believe you could not. You'd never allow yourself to be unkind, or even think disloyal things about her; but there would come times when your heart would be hungry, your soul empty. Then you would think of the sweet, God-given passion that I had had for you—." Tears came to the surface here, and Adele allowed them to remain on her cheeks. Her entreaty, she realized, was rapidly winning him; and she followed up her advantage with feverish,

though natural, eloquence. "It is not what the preachers call 'carnal,' Noel. It is as pure as anything in this world. You have felt it yourself, and therefore it must be. For I know that you, above anyone else on earth, are good all the way through."

She reached the point, at last, where emotion overpowered restraint; and lying in his arms she wept unaffectedly.

This was hard for the Missourian to endure; and yet he was conscious of a wild, unknown happiness.

"Adele," he said, kindly, "let us talk the matter over calmly. Don't you see how I am placed?"

Her face was still hidden, but she was more composed.

"I am a missionary, and what allowance I receive goes to my mother. What could I do for a girl who has been used to the luxury you have?"

When she realized that his objection concerned money, not his attachment, of whatever nature it was, for Jessie Kirkton, Adele took heart.

"Noel," she said, turning her face until their eyes met, "you don't yet seem to believe that I am in earnest. Do you think that money, clothes, pleasures, mean anything to me without you?"

The actress may have thought she meant every word of this statement. Under certain influences it is possible to be deceived as to the true state of one's

feelings—especially if one is blessed (or cursed) with "temperament."

"Maybe I have misjudged you," he returned, after a moment's thought. "If so, I beg your forgiveness. But, Adele, I can't quite feel that it would be right. Suppose you put yourself in Jessie's place, for a moment: how would you regard an individual who contemplated what——?"

For answer she threw her arms about his neck. He *did* contemplate "it," then!

And it was in this position that Peter found them, a moment later, as he innocently walked into the parlor.

"I'll take you with me for a year," she was saying. "You can study art—and make money at it too. Then, some day, you can take up your church work again——."

"I beg your pardon," said the intruder, being caught in the act of trying to escape unseen.

"Peter!" exclaimed Noel, gently extricating himself from his surroundings.

CHAPTER XI

PETER TAKES A HAND

THE Kansan's first article on the Philadelphia strike had resulted in his recall.

"I didn't send you down there to write a sermon," explained the editor, hotly, as Peter stood before his desk.

"Pardon me, but I don't quite understand."

The "chief" grunted. "You don't eh? Well, you will when you're in the newspaper business a while. Our mission is not that of a missionary among the heathen. Get that idea out of your head right on the start and it will save you a lot of trouble. Try to remember, in every squib you write, that the main object of an up-to-date journal is to make money—not converts. Why, you said enough in that editorial to turn all the employers in Ladner against us——"

"But I told the truth," interrupted the reporter; and was in turn interrupted:

"—Never mind that. Sometimes we can't do a worse thing than tell the truth."

"But in this case, sir," Peter objected, "the men were being treated shamefully by a compact of crooked politicians and barbarous millionaires. Poor

fellows who only wanted enough to live on; who were fighting not for pleasures and luxuries but simply bread for their families, were knocked down in the streets; some of them even killed."

The editor bit the end off a cigar and described a semicircular motion with his arm.

"I don't doubt it," he said, the merest trace of a smile appearing around the corners of his mouth. "But the *Evening Globe* can't afford to side with the under dog, my boy. Now let you and me understand each other right here. If I were like some of our worthy newspaper lords I'd make myself believe I was doing my duty by championing the cause of wealth. But I have no illusions in this regard. My game is to make money, just as the game of the other fellow is to make money; but the difference between us is that he likes deceiving himself and I don't. About the only kind of honesty I know, is honesty with myself—and that I am loath to surrender. But as the owner of a newspaper, Mr. Bosten, I know I am a liar and several other things, but certainly not a reformer."

Peter was not sure whether he ought to take these remarks seriously or not. He looked puzzled.

"But you believe in reform—down in your heart, don't you?" he asked, presently.

"I reckon I do. But if I began working out my

ideas on reform the *Evening Globe* would last about six months. The big advertisers would leave me, conservative thinkers would say I had gone crazy, even the preachers would shake their heads and whisper to each other about my lack of wisdom."

The Kansan grinned: his humiliation at being called back from Philadelphia was vanishing. He was beginning to appreciate the chief's cynical candor, realizing that considerable honesty of thought accompanied it.

"How is it," he asked, "that honest-minded men of intellect like you get into this dirty old game of money-grabbing and sacrifice their ideals one by one?"

The question was something of a stunner to the editor. He eyed the Kansan interestedly, almost admiringly.

"By gosh," he replied, emitting a great cloud of cigar smoke, "I have often asked myself that question. But it's ——— hard to answer. We seem to get sucked into the swim against our will. First we fall in love with some woman who demands, or whom we think demands, a lot of us. We begin our money-getting there. We must make her as good a home as her neighbor; clothe her as finely and provide her with the same leisure. But the task is a big one, in an environment where thousands of other men, some

of them smarter than ourselves, are trying to do the same thing. As others are not using legitimate means of attaining their ends, we, in order to cope successfully with them, are obliged to start using their tricks. Then comes the family. The boys and girls grow up and they begin *their* demands. They must have all the things their school or college associates have. The old man sits back with his cigar and sizes the situation up. He says to himself: 'If my children go without some of the pleasures Tom Brown's possess, Tom Brown and the other neighbors will think me incompetent.' This hurts his masculine pride, and he digs in harder than ever. He goes after the dollar with renewed vim, determined to get it by hook or crook. Usually, of course, —since others are doing it—he gets it by crook. At last the game gets hold of him. He may have all the money he needs, as I have myself, probably; but he can't give up the game. It has him. He loves to pit his brains and experience against those of other men. He even gets so hard that he enjoys seeing a competitor suffer."

The speaker paused to relight his cigar, and the listener put a pointed question.

"If it's the game that appeals to you, why don't you take a sporting chance and side with right occasionally?"

The editor laughed aloud at this remark, and uttered a mild profanity.

"That was rather clever," he admitted, chuckling over it afresh. "It almost calls my bluff, doesn't it? But you overlook one point, Bosten"—Peter was flattered with the familiarity. "—Which is this. In any game a man wants a fair chance, and there is none at all for the champion of right. He is up against impossible odds. That, in the last analysis, is why I go on bluffing the public. Once in a while I take up the cudgel in some worthy cause, without any thought of profit; but I never go to such extremes as continued adherence to truth and right would carry me. I am only human, you know; and this earth is far from heaven. The laws that govern us are imperfect, so how can you expect the governed to be perfect?"

Peter rarely ignored a direct challenge like this. He loved argument, moreover, with a man of brain.

"But why should you," he demanded, "conform to laws that only men have made? Are you not a man yourself?"

The chief responded with a question. Irrelevant it seemed at the moment.

"Do you believe in God?" he asked, simply.

"No," returned Peter; "not exactly. At least not the kind of god that most people worship. I can not

comprehend the Infinite, as many men claim to do."

"How about religion?"

"I reject it as the creation of men; unnecessary, illusory."

"You are an evolutionist then?"

"Yes."

"Good!" returned the editor. "So am I. Then let me remind you that the onward march of the universe is ruthless, unsentimental. We are what we are because of present and past environment. We achieve what we do by reason of effort, not faith. We are guided by laws that our environment has made, which can not be more noble than that environment. I, the owner of the *Evening Globe,* was born in this generation; a generation in which men cheat and deceive each other. I am no better or worse than my environment. If I had not lived until the year 2500 A. D. I would have been a nobler creature—since the evolution of man is upward. But living now I do as my fellows now do. My ideals are those of to-day, and to-morrow's ideals are of no present use to me. Those we call reformers are dreamers: they live in the future and do not accomplish anything to-day."

"But why do they *desire* to accomplish something unaccomplished?" Peter asked, suddenly.

"Ah," came the reply, "now you are getting into

religion—which you and I do not accept. Their impractical desires are the result of the delusion we know by the name of 'faith.' It concerns the unknown, and can have no place in the mind of a logical, practical man."

The Kansan was nonplussed for a moment; but presently he recalled a statement of the editor's that helped him.

"You asserted that the tendency of evolution was 'upward.' What do you mean by 'upward'?"

The smoker chewed his cigar a moment in silence, finally grinning.

"I suppose," he remarked, "that I ought to be proud of a secretary with such a faculty for argument. But what are you driving at in your question, Bosten? I don't believe you are a Free Thinker after all."

The remark struck home. Peter wondered to what extent the influence and conversation of Noel Crayne had changed his habits of thought. Was he reaching out for the "spiritual understanding" which Noel claimed to possess?

"I try to be," he replied. "But I am not wedded to any creed,—the agnostic's or any other. What I am trying to find is Truth; and discussions like this are an invaluable aid. The question I put to you is one I have often put to myself. It is easy to say that the

trend of evolution is upward: but of what standards are we thinking when we make the assertion, and who has created them? Who is the judge of what is elevating and what is not; of the noble and the ignoble?"

"Man," returned the editor, decisively. "And in proportion as he develops in the scale of life his standards rise. The standards to-day are higher than they were yesterday. You and I live to-day, instead of yesterday or to-morrow, and are what we are because of our surroundings. Therefore, Bosten, don't join the ranks of the Socialists and dreamers and spoil your present-day comforts. Learn to smoke, like me, and ease that prairie conscience of yours! Of one thing in this world we are sure: a man can be happy if he wants to. Look at me: I have not scrupled to gobble up my neighbor, just as he has not scrupled to gobble up somebody else. But I am healthy and happy. And I am respected. . . . Here, take these readers down to the Frolic Theater and see if they are satisfactory. If not, write others. They've been taking good space lately."

As he walked toward the theater Peter reviewed his chief's answer to the question regarding the morals of evolution, and was far from satisfied with the reply.

In fact, Peter recognized that there had been no

reply at all. The chief's words were an equivocation. He had ignored the question. Instead of attempting to give the nature and origin of moral standards he had made the assumption that they existed and progressed; but what *progression* involved, he did not attempt to say.

Did the editor comprehend? Peter asked himself. Had the inner meaning of the question been intelligible to him?

"The inner meaning," repeated the Kansan. "What is it, anyway? What is this element reformers possess, which makes them not only dissatisfied with their environment but lifts them above it? What is this Thing by which we judge all things? Is it the same potentiality that Noel Crayne and his fellow believers possess? If so what is its nature? And why do some men cherish it and others fail to comprehend it? If the chief possessed it would he work out his unhumanitarian ideas and smoke himself into complacency as he does? If I were wholly without it would I have the desire I have to make myself and the world better?"

Peter contrasted the selfish principles his editor cherished with the high ideals of truly religious people. The latter might be deceived, but even so were not their beliefs, and practices based upon such, in-

finitely more desirable from the standpoint of common rectitude than those of men like the editor?

"Yes," murmured the Kansan, "I concede that. To be honest, I must. But this does not necessarily make the ideals of religious people dependent upon their beliefs. There are honest, noble, striving agnostics and infidels. The question is: do men and women endeavor to do 'right' more earnestly with faith, belief in heavenly rewards and so on, as an incentive, than they would merely on principle? If so, then religion is desirable—for the present, at any rate. But may there not come a time when human beings will do right and love right for the sake of the thing itself? In that case, of course, there would still have to be an incentive. And what would it be? What is it in my own life, for instance?"

Here, as Noel had done in mentally discussing the same question, Peter came to the end of reason. That he had an incentive for doing noble deeds, for aiding and loving his fellow men, for instance, he was convinced; but what it was he could not determine. It was a desire of the heart. But whence had it come? "From God," said religionists. "That is an assumption," murmured the thinker. "I can not accept it. It does not appeal to me."

Yet Peter was unable to answer the question himself, and the realization saddened him. Noel's be-

lief that the impulse to do good came from God made *him* happy.

At the theater the newspaperman learned Adele Cressy's address; and, the readers having proven acceptable, called at the hotel on his way back to the office. Peter was half glad he had been recalled from Philadelphia so soon, for now he had ample time, before "The Prince of Pilsen" left town, to fathom the mystery involving Noel Crayne.

The hotel clerk gave him the number of the actress's room and told him if he did not find her there to look in the private parlors. It was while doing so that the Kansan found them in each other's arms, as heretofore recorded.

To say that Adele was embarrassed, in spite of the fact that she went through love scenes before an audience every day, would be putting it mildly. She colored violently, stammered confused words of greeting, and a moment afterwards excused herself, leaving the old friends together.

Owing to the situation in which he had been found Noel was naturally not quite himself for a while; but the presence of his chum at length restored him, and they drifted into their old intimacy.

"I'm dying for an explanation of all this," grinned the Kansan, when he deemed the remark safe. "Not out of idle curiosity, you know."

"I know that," Noel replied, his gaze wavering. "There were never many superficialities, let alone conventionalities, between you and me, Peter."

The tone was pensive. As a matter of fact, Noel was being carried back to other times and another environment. Since last seeing Peter he had taken leave of Jessie Kirkton, at Chicago, and expressed to her a hope she reciprocated, that "God would open the way before them."

Natural reaction from an infatuated condition of mind was enhanced by the reminiscences that came with Peter.

The missionary did not speak with his customary lucidity. He described his work in Ladner and the events that had led up to his meeting with the actress, with a certain languor of tone; attaching, Peter thought, exaggerated importance to the opposition of a fellow church member, and speaking of his passion for Adele with unconvincing eloquence.

"My dear old fellow," said the Kansan, at last, "you are not yourself. I hear the voice and see the face I knew in Missouri; but they seem to lack some of their old strength—you will forgive me for saying it." The Missourian was regarding him intently, a troubled frown on his countenance. "What you need is a change. Get away from these little minds that can't stand the truth here in Ladner. Go back

home for the summer, and reinforce yourself. You should have gone to conference this year, and talked things over with Jessie. You're overdoing this religious game, Noel. And the woman question—don't let it upset you. This Cressy girl may be all right; in fact, I always liked her in a way; but she's not for you. I couldn't help overhearing her hint that she'd support you by her acting and carry you along on the road, as a free-lance artist. That sounds romantic at present, but you wouldn't last a month. The life would disgust you, Noel—a man of your ambitions and sentiments. It's the fight for you; the fight against ease and luxury and mortal foolishness. I can plainly see that. And as for the feeling you have for Adele—it wouldn't last. It would burn itself out on one side or the other. You are both temperamental, both dipped in the fire, and matrimony would change your romance into something that would terrify you."

Peter halted a moment, to give his friend the opportunity of putting in a word; but Noel sat like one in a stupor, his eyes holding the dim luster of pain. Nevertheless, it was obvious that his mental faculties were alert.

"That day you first told me about Adele you convinced me, if I had not been already convinced, that Jessie Kirkton was the only girl in the world for you.

You think she is of your own disposition—but she isn't. You are opposites. Her aspirations may correspond with yours, but her make-up is different. You appear to be a calm, cool customer on the surface; but down beneath are fires that would even burn actresses up if they once got going. It is these that hold Jessie Kirkton, too; just as it is her sweet calmness of soul that so vitally appeals to your soul. Infatuations may come and go; but when the noon sun wanes and twilight calls, your heart cries out for the rest only one other heart can give. You know this; but in moments like the present, under the spell of these physical passions of ours, you overlook it—as all men do at one time or another in their lives."

Noel had dropped his head in his hands, and the Kansan's voice grew softer.

"I'm glad I turned up, Noel. When a fellow fights this battle alone he sometimes loses out. Your faith might have helped you; I don't know. But I do know that the dispassionate views of a friend, a real friend, often do help. I had an attack myself, Noel, before I met Helen Dyke. That is how I was so sure that she was the right one. Of course, it hasn't worked out: but—I still—."

He broke off, with a sigh; then quickly changed his tone.

"Cheer up, old top," he said, striking the Missourian's knee heartily, "it's all in a lifetime! We've got to come through it. When it's all over we'll be wiser, and then maybe the universe will give us a rest."

Noel raised his head slowly, and Peter saw the phenomenon of a tear—the tear that a man may shed once in his life for a woman.

"Peter," he said, rather unsteadily, "God sent you to me. I know he did. You have been his instrument; you with your human reasoning and knowledge gained in the fight. These few words of yours seem to have made a new person of me. I see things differently than I did half an hour ago. Come, let us go for a walk—out into the fresh air." But the Missourian checked himself. "No," he said, "there's Adele. I can't go away like this."

"Sure you can," returned Peter. "Leave Adele to me."

It flashed across the missionary's mind that this might be another turn in an unseen plan that would work out for the best. Peter and Adele might form an attachment,—who knew? Without another word he followed the Kansan out, his mind reverting to the marvel of Peter's "instrumentality."

"Yes," he resumed, on the street, "in spite of your faithlessness, Peter, the Lord has used you. Oh, I wish you could believe in his mercy and love as I do!"

Peter was silent. In truth, he was analyzing a half-formed wish in his own heart that did not altogether antagonize Noel's. Faith must be sweet, after all: to feel assurance that an all-wise Power ever guided in the affairs of men, despite their littleness, would be infinite consolation. Wishing, however, did not seem to make this faith possible.

"By the way," asked the Missourian, after a short silence, "were you serious in suggesting that I go back West for a visit?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Peter, "and you're going, too. I've got the money to spare and I'm just dying to put it out at interest. Noel, old boy, it's not for your own sake alone. Think of Jessie. These hearts of ours demand a certain amount of attention, you know. That ought to be clear to you after——"

"It is, Peter; it is! I believe I'll accept your advice —and your help. It will be a pleasure to put myself under further obligation to you."

Noel then told him of having resigned the pastorship of Ladner Branch, and the agnostic agreed that it was a sensible thing to do, under the circumstances. But, even as he thus expressed himself, there was a conviction in his mind that the Noel Crayne of the future should deal more masterfully with such a situation.

"And Peter," said the Missourian, as they parted,

for the time being, at the Globe office, "I hope you will sound as convincing to Adele, when you see her, as you did to me."

"Where's you faith?" laughed the Kansan, disappearing through a revolving door.

"Where, indeed!" murmured Noel, turning in the direction of his boarding house, and thinking solemnly of his first great temptation.

CHAPTER XII

IN JOURNALISM

PETER got an hour's leave from his employer and went immediately back to the Quincy Hotel. He wanted to interview the actress before she should have a chance to see Noel.

En route, he decided upon a plan of attack. He would make her feel that she had grossly wronged both the church and a pair of true lovers.

Adele was still in her room, and she consented to interview the caller whom a bellboy had announced. Peter awaited her in the parlor they had occupied a short time since, strengthening his psychologic position the while. He felt that he knew the way of temperamental persons better than the unsophisticated missionary did, and was not in fear of going down to defeat before the actress.

He observed, as she entered, that her eyes were not tear-marked and that her dress had been changed. Evidently, instead of sobbing on a pillow, she had been improving slightly on nature. That she could do so, Peter hardly felt competent to deny. Truly, she did look beautiful in this dainty attire.

"Miss Cressy," he said, rising, "I came to apolo-

gize for interrupting you a while ago, and to have a little chat, if you don't mind?"

She smiled. "Aren't you rather formal?"

"Perhaps," he laughed. "But you've become so great I'm rather shaky in your presence, you know."

She waved the gallantry aside, but, obviously, was not altogether displeased with it.

"We were choir members together in Missouri, weren't we? And, oh yes—do you remember the ghost party at Garners'? Why, that was where we first got really acquainted, wasn't it?"

"I believe it was." He sighed, genuinely; an item that did not escape her. "Those were the best times I ever spent in my life." Peter unwittingly lapsed into reverie, the while she studied him.

By and by she spoke, softly.

"I met a friend of yours not long ago, Mr. Bosten. She's attending Princeton University now."

The Kansan could feel the blood suffusing his cheeks; but he casually answered: "Oh, is that so?" After which, with great alacrity, he changed the subject of conversation.

"I suppose you have a lot of callers in a day, and I won't keep you here any longer than I can help. Frankly, Miss Cressy, I came on Noel's behalf—are you surprised?"

She returned his gaze scrutinizingly.

"Did Noel send you?"

"No indeed. He doesn't know I am here." A pause. "Adele,"—he put intimacy into his tone as well as his speech, "you are worlds wiser than our missionary. He is a baby in experience compared with you. Do you understand what I am getting at?"

She became indignant immediately, necessitating a little severity on the Kansan's part.

"I see that you do," he continued. "Now listen here, it isn't fair to do what you're doing. Do you think it is?"

She rose, as if to leave; and Peter became desperate.

"You haven't got the courage to listen to me—is that it?"

Pride seized her, at this, and sitting down again she eyed him with hostility, her color exceedingly high.

"I can't see," she observed, with more than a touch of sarcasm, "where *you* come in, Mr. Bosten."

He grinned under the thrust, and deemed it advisable to remain good-natured.

"That's how all the trouble started," he answered. "I *did* come in. And I'm thinking it was a stroke of fate. You had him pretty well hypnotized, if you'll pardon the expression. You know, Miss Cressy,

Noel hasn't the heart to refuse anybody anything. He's too good-natured to live. I wish you could have seen him a moment after you had gone, though. Honestly, he almost cried."

A flash of pity crossed her face, and the orator followed up his advantage. He used every means known to him of convincing a woman of her cruelty. He became eloquent upon the ideal affection existing between a bishop's niece and a lonesome young dreamer, away off at the end of the earth; intimated that any fascinating woman who would take advantage of such a situation, particularly when she knew it meant the severing of religious as well as heart ties, must be very wicked indeed; spoke of the infatuation a person of temperament may wrongfully exercise for a sympathetic fellow artist, and of the singular unhappiness of marriages based upon such infatuation: in fact, dissertated at such great length and with such apparent earnestness that finally the actress wept real tears and acknowledged that she had been guided by passion rather than reason.

At this stage of the interview Peter began administering the balm of sympathy, in the form of the nobler kind of flattery; finally enjoying the supreme satisfaction of seeing a gradual change in Adele's feelings toward him. Before he left her they shook

hands warmly and made an engagement for dinner together after the theater.

"Something mighty honest about that girl, at that," he soliloquized on leaving the hotel.

All the way back to the office he thought of her; excusing her actions toward Noel on the grounds of temperament, of which she undoubtedly possessed a liberal share; sympathizing with her on this score, in fact, and hoping it would not be the cause of sorrow in her life. That she had kept herself unspotted thus far he believed: that she would continue to do so he found it harder to believe. There was no more difficult path to honestly tread than that which led from the footlights to the stage door. Reading and reportorial observation had convinced the Kansan of that.

Noel and Jessie had deserted his thoughts completely, for the moment. Their happiness was now assured. But Adele Cressy, the actress who had sung her first songs in prayer meeting, and risen to music-hall fame in a few months, remained in his mind. He speculated, too, on the influence of her personality. He could feel it now himself, as he had felt it, to some extent, the morning they had met in the basement of the Petit City church. What if, one day, she should choose to fancy him? Would he be able to resist her?

A cynical smile crept over the Kansan's face at the reflection. He recalled his one and only real love affair and the distrust that had killed it. No,—no more of that for him. He was through with such pangs. Helen Dyke might be at Princeton a thousand times, or might live on the same street with him, for all he cared. The gulf would always remain between them. Nor was it a gulf of faith, as far as Peter could see. It was a gulf of moral suspicion. She did not believe in *him*, regardless of his creed. That was the bitter thought, the stumblingblock to his happiness.

In the course of a few days Noel departed for the West, without bidding Adele farewell. She expressed herself to Peter, who dined with her twice before "The Prince of Pilsen" left town, as "just as glad they were spared the awkwardness of a parting"; and Peter noted with gratification that the tears did not stand in her eyes, either.

However, let it be said that even the shrewd and feminine-suspecting Kansan did not know woman thoroughly. He failed to give Adele credit for the strength of character she possessed. He did not know how sorely she strove against misery at this time. He saw her at the train, as she departed for another city; but did not see into her stateroom when the train moved out.

Noel did not dissemble so well as the actress before their mutual friend, Peter. His cheeks had lost color, in one short week; and now, as he said those simple words which meant "God be with you," his voice was unsteady.

"Dear old fellow," murmured the Kansan, as he turned back, rather heartsick himself, to this city that held nothing of particular interest to him now, "I wish I were going with you."

In the Missourian's presence Peter always felt happy. Noel added something to his life that came close to making it complete.

Now, however, he was alone again. Ladner might be a "small puddle" (to use the Park Row editor's metaphor) as compared with New York; but it was big enough to make a stranger feel lost.

Peter was reflecting, one afternoon, several weeks after his friend's departure, on the perversity of a fate that should keep on separating them like this, when the "chief" rang for him.

"Go up to this address," came the order, "and get a story from the new preacher who is staying there. One of the big guns in this church has promised to take weekly space if we'll pay some attention to their congregation. Seems their religion needs popularity; so Mr. What's-his-name is going to buy some,

and he thinks we're the fellows who sell it. I guess we are too, eh, Bosten?"

Peter was treated with informal good-fellowship by his employer when the latter was not smoking too much.

"I'm afraid we are," he replied. "By the way, how did you like that last editorial of mine?"

"Terrible," returned the editor. "Too true to life and too literary. You'll have to get down to earth."

"I thought you said it was true to life?"

"Yes—Oh, get out of here and don't bother me. And remember, give that guy a boost, no matter how big a scoundrel he is."

Mechanically the secretary-reporter-hack betook himself off, musing on the Shame of Journalism. He made a mental note of the title, deciding to write an essay on it in his spare time, and not submit it for publication.

The name on his memorandum slip seemed vaguely familiar to Peter, but he could not remember where he had heard it. The address denoted an aristocratic locality.

"Rather ironical," he soliloquized, walking in the shade of a row of great chestnuts, "that a fellow of my convictions should be assigned a job of this sort. This is loathsome work, this fawning upon wealth.

I'll sicken of it one of these days and fly away to the hills."

He entered a heavy iron gate and walked up a gravel path leading to broad steps of brownstone, which gave access to a series of verandas surrounding the mansion. Here, he smiled to himself, was "filler" for an article, in case the preacher proved unworthy of description.

A maid admitted him, and he was immediately confronted by an attractive-looking young woman of perhaps twenty, whose mode of dress suited her features and comported with her environment. She seemed very pleased to make the acquaintance of a representative of the *Evening Globe*, and, with a freer manner than he had anticipated, led the Kansan into a large drawing room—which he would have described with the one word "golden."

"The gentleman you came to see has not come in yet," she informed him, "but we expect him any moment. Do you mind waiting?"

"Not at all," he replied, with a faint smile, gallantly adding, "under the circumstances."

She blushed a trifle but outwardly ignored his compliment, and referred to a civic topic that was of interest to most Ladnerites. He discovered that she possessed a versatile mind, but judged it to be an idle one. They were becoming quite friendly

when the parson arrived. He stood in the doorway a moment, his eyes fixed on Peter's. Presently the Kansan was also staring at him.

"Didn't we meet in Petit City?" asked the preacher, advancing toward the reporter.

"I remember now," returned Peter, extending his hand. "It was at Craynes'. You are Mr. Rollins. I'm glad to meet you again."

Miss Jacobs gazed at both of them bewilderedly.

"Millicent," said Rollins, turning to her, "Mr. Bosten is an old friend of Noel Crayne's."

Expressing agreeable surprise, Millicent yielded to the formal introduction, and remarked that any friend of "Brother Crayne's" was welcome in their home.

Peter remembered now where he had heard the name "Jacobs." Noel had mentioned it in connection with the fatal business meeting, where the beginning of everything had happened. These were the people who had been the cause of his resignation.

The Kansan also recalled his first impression of Rollins. This representative of Noel's church had stood out among Mrs. Crayne's remarkable little party as the only half-sincere man present. That he should have gravitated to the society of the Jacobses, and to a pleasant pasture like the Ladner

"branch," was not surprising. Doubtless he had worked to that very end for a long time.

So ran Peter's thoughts as he exchanged commonplaces with the preacher whom the "shame of journalism" compelled him to eulogize.

Millicent asked them to excuse her, saying that she knew her mother would like to meet a friend of the former pastor's; and while she was gone Peter felt uncomfortable. He was not at home in the company of this clerical.

Mrs. Jacobs soon came in, however, radiating welcome as profusely as she did perfume; and the reporter was made to feel how mighty is the press. After displaying his wit a little and observing with secret pride that he impressed Mrs. Jacobs, he was rewarded with an invitation to remain for dinner, which he could not decently refuse, "under the circumstances"—the circumstances again having to do with the pretty daughter. No newspaperman of any standing whatever can, in justice to his profession, ignore the feminine in matters of business. They are responsible for much news and many sensations, upon which the best of journals depend for their circulation. Pleasing the Jacobses, in this case, was pleasing the *Evening Globe*: the fount of Peter's material blessings just now.

Moreover, if further excuse for his remaining to

dinner be needed, he wanted to study these members of Noel's church, who were different from the others with whom he had associated.

"Have you known Mr. Crayne very long, if I may ask?" said Mrs. Jacobs, as if casually. And before answering, the skeptical Kansan transformed the question, thus: "Do you know Mr. Crayne well enough, I wonder, to be his confidant? Has he told you about the business meeting?"

"We've been friends for something over two years," he replied. "But, unfortunately, I haven't seen much of him since he became a missionary for your church. It was just my luck that he chanced to be leaving Ladner as I arrived. We had scarcely any time together at all."

This answer obviously relieved Mrs. Jacobs's mind. The cautious look left her eye and she launched into a eulogium upon the character of Noel. Peter knew it to be rank hypocrisy, and wished she would stop before he was goaded into saying something sarcastic. Millicent, however, came to the rescue. She was more honest than either her mother or Rollins, Peter thought, as he glanced from one to the other. At dinner he decided that Millicent was the choice of the family.

Arthur, the son, was typical of a class Peter despised. Polite, tactful, superficially charitable, inor-

dinately complimentary, and deplorably insincere. And if Arthur was the chip, his father was the block. Peter's estimate of this family practically coincided with Noel's.

It was apparent that all of them, with the possible exception of Millicent, sought to impress him. Even the daughter was carried away, at intervals, with the impression that she was dealing with a frightened member of the church. She was several times on the verge of a grand platitude, when a man-of-the-world twinkle in the reporter's eye halted her.

Peter realized, with considerable conceit but not many thrills, that she liked him and was half afraid of him. He even conceived (with egotistic candor of thought) of the possibility of an infatuation on her side; sincerely hoping, however, that no such contingency would ever arise.

The dinner was the best Peter had ever eaten. He told Mrs. Jacobs so, in his unmannerly, frank way, when it was finished; establishing himself, thereby, more firmly in her regard. She beamed on him during coffee.

The Kansan had a new experience at this sumptuous meal. Although duly impressed with the grandness of the occasion, he had an absurd inclination to indulge in impolite laughter. Something amused him so much he could scarcely contain him-

self. He tried to ascertain what the disturbing factor was, finally deciding that it was the entire absence of Sincerity. He thought in capitals, again, and noted the title for a new essay.

Probably the good food and stimulating coffee might have something to do with it, he mused: mechanically answering questions affecting life in Petit City and New York, the while. Or the fact that they were feeding him for the news column he was to write, might be to blame.

Again, the absence of religious conversation, at this the table of a popular member of Noel's church, might be responsible for his inward hilarity; the outcome, he felt, of mere brutish enjoyment.

Was this how they lived all the time—apart from the idea and fact of material sacrifice? Was this the way all rich families lived: circling round a full table and a heap of ephemeral topics? The agnostic could not help wondering.

The usual philosophizings occupied his inner mind, as he conversed about nothing.

In the evolution of mankind, how small, how mean was this stomach-feeding present! The scene before him: well-dressed men and charming women (one of them at least); a full board surrounded by little minds: how futile, how foolish it seemed!

Tiring at length of their tongue-talk, Peter threw out a challenge to the minister.

"Do you think, Mr. Rollins," he asked, "that this civic reform which is going on now in every city, has the proper elements within it to make for permanent improvement?"

Mr. Rollins was a long moment comprehending the question, but finally succeeded in returning a compromising answer, which, in fact, said nothing. Then Mr. Jacobs, who was plainly thirsting for an opportunity to ventilate his views observed:

"It all lacks one thing, Mr. Bosten," he said—"the Spirit of God."

Peter could scarcely have been more startled, intellectually. Had he heard aright? Had this well-dressed barbarian ("barbarian" is the word he had in mind) descended to metaphysics, to the spiritual, in one casual swoop? Why, he spoke as though the thought involved were very familiar to him.

However, the agnostic recovered from his surprise as the speaker proceeded to elucidate.

"He is familiar with spiritual terminology," mused Peter, eyeing his reflection in a platter; "it is a lesson he has learned, superficially, as I believe he has learned the lesson of life. The real significance of it may not be apparent to him. In fact, to whom is it apparent?"

"To Noel Crayne," answered a voice from nowhere.

Peter glanced quickly at Rollins. But it was obvious that the minister had not made the remark. He was joking, in an undertone, with Arthur Jacobs. Whence had the voice come? Strange!—it seemed so real.

"An illusion," he thought; pursuing, however, reflection of the message brought.

Noel Crayne, then, comprehended the meaning of this phrase the "Spirit of God." The influence, of whatever nature it might be, that made for adequate, lasting reform, was called the "Spirit of God": and Noel Crayne understood it.

Peter could not rid his mind of the reflection. Even while he wrote the news column about Theodore Rollins and the great work that the gentleman had come to Ladner to accomplish, this other thought was revolving in his brain. It troubled him as he closed his eyes in sleep, even projecting itself into his dreams.

One consideration reconciled the Kansan to the flattering spirit of his article on Rollins: the fact that individuals whom Noel Crayne loved and had labored among, would benefit by the advertisement. The church of which Noel was so conscientious a member needed the publicity. That was enough for Peter.

When the article appeared appreciations began coming in to the editor, and so he took the trouble to read what his employee had written.

"Bosten," he said, "you put your heart into that thing. How did you do it? Is this sky-pilot all you claim for him—and the rest of them?"

"I'm thinking," grinned the reporter, "that it was 'the rest of them' I had in mind when I wrote, rather than Mr. Rollins. However, I'm glad it had an effect."

"Good business," returned the chief, and repeated, "good business."

Peter was also called up on the telephone and invited to the place again. They were having a party.

Chiefly because he was lonely, he accepted; and his associations with this family, superficial and disappointing though they were, strengthened. The family had their good points, when all was said.

Finally they induced him to take a vacation with them down to the shore. He was not enthusiastic until Millicent told him a religious reunion was being held, at which some of the leading lights of their church would be present, and where there would be outdoor sports.

Millie thought it was mention of the sports that first enlisted his interest; but the truth was, Peter's intellect and heart were longing for the companion-

ship, distant though it might be, of such minds as the Sterns' and Noel Crayne's again. That they would be found at the reunion he had no doubt. He was at a loss to quite understand this longing, but that was a familiar feeling with Peter.

It was arranged that he should share Arthur Jacobs's tent, paying his own way, however; and spend a week at the shore. His "chief" told him to keep his eye open for sensations and bring back a healthier complexion.

CHAPTER XIII

AN EASTERN REUNION

REGRETS were Peter's portion, as a result of his acquiescence in the Jacobs holiday plan, until he came to the spot chosen by the reunion for its encampment. Then, as he gazed over the area of tents, half hidden in the grove beyond the clearing, upon the sparkling waters and a white beach that glistened through the trees, he forgot the patronizing airs of his host, and was glad he had come.

Arthur's tent had already been pitched by the butler, who had considered it an outrage that a man of his standing should be forced to leave the city on an errand of this nature. The Kansan murmured, as he stepped through the slit in the canvas, that money was a pretty handy thing after all. Perhaps the first object that engaged his attention was a guitar in one corner of the tent.

"Hello," he said, "do you play that?"

"No," returned Arthur; "but Millie does a little. The mandolin is my instrument—there it is under the writing table."

"When Miss Jacobs isn't around, then, we'll have a bachelor's duet. I strum the guitar myself, after a fashion."

As there was a lull in the camp and nothing in particular to do for the moment, Arthur suggested that they throw back the flaps and tune up, to which suggestion Peter readily agreed, being curious to know something of his fellow camper's attainments.

For the first time, the unimpressionable Kansan was agreeably surprised in Arthur. The latter played well, not always on one string alone, and could even sing an acceptable tenor. Peter swung in with him easily, performing some bass runs, and finding the harmony as readily as he had done back at college.

"By Jove," said Arthur, when they had finished the first attempt, "when Millie hears that you'll never get her to touch the thing again!"

Peter grinned, apologetically, explaining that he had merely picked it up unscientifically.

"All the same, Bosten, you're right there."

Soon the melody penetrated to drowsy ears, and tent-flaps began to open within a radius of fifty yards. By and by the boys and girls began coming around, most of whom greeted Arthur with genial familiarity, declaring that they knew in their sleep he had come to camp.

The Kansan began to make the acquaintance of athletic young men and "stunning" maidens. (As a newspaperman he must be allowed occasional col-

loquialisms of this nature). In the course of an hour or two, as the joyous company which now filled Arthur's tent and extended also in a semicircle before it, joined in whatever song was started, old-time or "popular," Peter had decided they were very much like the Missouri boys and girls of this same church. He felt his heart warm toward them, and was conscious of a species of joy which he had not known since coming East.

As evening came on, however, and the cicadas filled the air with their singing, the Kansan was carried back to other groups of merry-makers, where sat one dearer to him than the rest; a creature of olive complexion, undeceivable eyes and peculiar grace. Although he mechanically followed the harmony, his soul no longer responded; it was suffering again the old pangs and battling with an emotion that seemed likely to live always.

When the company dispersed for supper, Millie came to him with glowing eyes and told him how clever he was.

"Is there anything you can't do?" she asked.

He pretended to think a moment, seriously, and a foolish answer came to the tip of his tongue. Had he considered it a second longer he would have restrained it.

"Yes," he replied, impulsively, "I can't fall in love."

The folly of the reply and the blushes it had brought, like fire, to the cheeks of Miss Jacobs embarrassed the speaker and he, too, blushed. He tried to laugh it off, but it was one of those flippant remarks that do not dissolve in laughter. Each knew the other's mirth to be forced.

From that indiscreet moment Millicent became noticeably coy in his presence. And, for various reasons: because he rather liked Millie; because he was good natured; and because young persons were pairing off all over the camp: Peter began to "go around" with her. There was something in the air that made it easy to do so.

Saturday evening they attended preaching service together in the big tent; and while the opening hymn was being sung, with the soul and sincerity that these people put into all their worship, Peter felt an awakening of the old thrills.

Did the laws of psychology account for this? he asked himself. If so, why had he not felt it in the churches on Fifth Avenue, where he had gone occasionally on a Sunday night, during his lonely life in Manhattan? Were there not psychological forces at work in an aristocratic congregation as well? Doubtless. But they did not thrill him. Therefore, they

could not have been of the same *quality* as these forces surrounding the activities of Noel's church.

Thus, by a different route, did the Kansan arrive at an idea which Noel Crayne had labored to conceive.

He was pondering over this idea, quite oblivious to Millie's presence, when the voice of the preacher roused him.

A short, broad-shouldered man of unclerical appearance was speaking. He had the face of a sea captain and the mien of a farmer; but his intellect, Peter soon discovered, was a thing refined. The sentences came somewhat brokenly, but not one of them lacked a point. The speaker built his argument with the care and certainty of a master builder; hewing away the false from the true with clear vision; laying fact upon fact with admirable precision.

"Here's a logician—like President Stern," murmured the Kansan.

Nevertheless, this man with the brain of a scientist took the step that carried him beyond Peter's sight, as the President had done that conference Sabbath in Petit City, and as other exponents of Noel's faith had done.

Peter sighed. "Why," he asked of the universe, "is my mind at variance with the minds of these men

whom I admire? Why do not I cherish the faith they cherish?"

Next morning he had occasion to still further interrogate the unknown. He attended the nine o'clock prayer meeting, which was considered the "spiritual feast" of the day, and saw and heard there that which was most bewildering.

One old gentleman, gentle but calm of speech, had recited the story of his religious career briefly, and was counseling younger men to follow "the straight and narrow way," when his hand was raised, as if by a will other than his own, and he uttered words that made the congregation weep. Peter, himself, felt considerable emotion; but he fancied it was the psychologic effect of all this mind-harmony and admirable sincerity of heart.

Nevertheless, during the intermission that preceded preaching service, he found himself still impressed, and disinclined to engage in casual conversation. He strolled down a quiet path into the grove and reflected on what he had heard and seen.

Did these people have the truth after all? Was Jesus Christ the Son of God, the God of these believers, and was his gospel really the "plan of salvation"? If so, then it was impossible to reject such strange phenomena as the morning prayer meeting had presented. They were no more incomprehen-

sible than simple faith in God's existence and Christ's divinity!

The eleven o'clock sermon chanced to be in harmony with the Kansan's reflections. It was delivered by the youngest member of the Twelve Apostles; a fair, mild-mannered man upon whose countenance Thought had placed her benediction, and in whose voice there were no wavering notes. He announced that he would speak about "first principles"; which he did; dwelling upon the necessity for faith, then repentance from sin and baptism by immersion. The carnal mind having been thus subdued by the "will of God," this earthly temple was in a condition to receive the "gift of the Holy Spirit." After that came "good works," upon which one depended most of all for "inheritance in the Kingdom of God" hereafter and the privilege of coming forth at "the first resurrection."

There was none of the old familiar, irrational doctrine, so consoling to duty-shirkers, of grace-salvation, heavenly "special privilege" and the divine "rights of the few." It was a democratic, meritorious doctrine this young man preached, free from apologies for "influence" and wrongdoing; and when the sermon was finished, Peter enthusiastically murmured:

"By Jove, if the Bible be true these people are the nearest right of any!"

At noon he looked around the dining tent for signs of Western celebrities, hoping the well-remembered face of President Stern would stand out from the others. But Millie, who was sitting across from him beside Arthur, informed him, in answer to a query, that Mr. Stern was on the Pacific coast at present.

Three o'clock marked the beginning of another sermon, which the Kansan was waiting to hear; for he had just been introduced to the speaker: a short, jolly gray-haired man whose age it was impossible to determine. He was one of the drollest individuals Peter had ever met. Usually the Kansan was hard to please, in the matter of wit; but he found himself smiling in advance when this gentleman's lips showed signs of moving.

However this inclination was soon forgotten when Mr. Freely began his sermon. It seemed to one of his listeners, at least, that he had taken his cue from the morning speaker's remarks. At any rate he referred to the same text, but based his argument on the clause, "Let us go on unto perfection " (Hebrews 6: 1), rather than that which enumerated the "principles of the doctrine of Christ."

Mr. Freely was eloquent. He had a style that indicated a taste for literature, if not capabilities in

that direction. But it was not the form that appealed most to Peter: it was the substance.

The speaker spoke of the necessity for good works upon the part of believers. "Faith without works is dead," he quoted. He went into the psychology of the thing, showing how easily deceived a satisfied mind becomes. He referred to history in instancing the bigotry religious complacency generates.

"No heart and no mind," he remarked, in the course of his sermon, "is beyond the pernicious influence of illusory faith. I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, that true faith involves intelligent conception and consistent conduct."

The Kansan wanted to make some such exclamation as "Whew!" at this point.

"I've got to have a chat with that man," he resolved.

And before the speaker's remarks were concluded Peter had strengthened in this resolution.

He carried it out, too, late in the afternoon; being directed to Mr. Freely's tent by Mrs. Jacobs, who considered him "a good talker but inclined to be extreme in his views."

"Often," she remarked, reclining on a mountain of cushions in Arthur's tent, "I think our missionaries would do more good if they paid greater atten-

tion to the outsiders and less to people inside the church."

Which, by the way, was about as honest a statement as the Kansan had ever heard her make.

Mr. Freely was caught in the act of reading a volume Peter quickly recognized as the product of a skeptic-socialist's brain.

"Why, Mr. Freely," he said, smilingly, "I'm surprised at you."

The preacher enjoyed his situation, apparently.

"Don't tell on me," he returned. "Excommunication or the rack might follow—one never knows. We still live in a barbarous age."

"I agree with you." The Kansan felt at home already. Here was a mind which, he believed, would follow his, and which he could follow with the interest that comes only with mental striving. "But," he added, "as excommunication could only happen to you inside the church, why do you refer to barbarism!"

It was said by his admirers that Freely never had to think for an answer. He did not hesitate, now, at any rate.

"We have them in the church, Mr. Bosten, I'm afraid."

"The intellectual kind, you mean?"

"All kinds. 'The Kingdom of God is like a net cast

into the sea.' We find sharks, crabs and lobsters in it."

Peter laughed at the simile.

"But seriously, Mr. Freely," he rejoined, "you people claim to have the 'fullness of the gospel.' Shouldn't you be better than those who cherish only part of it—as you believe the other denominations do?"

"We should be, yes. If we lived up to our message we would be perfect. But that we do not live up to it is no reflection upon the message itself."

"Granted. But don't you claim to be actuated by the Spirit of God to a fuller extent than those you call 'sectarians'?"

The preacher's countenance became more sober.

"I believe, Mr. Bosten," he answered, "that a good, intelligent member of our faith is the highest type of Christian, or, in other words, of man. If I did not believe so I would ally myself with a denomination that appealed to me more. The gospel as we have been taught it, through Christ and by the inspiration of God's Spirit in this age, represents the highest conception of right to me. That I see a failure upon the part of myself and others to fully live up to its requirements does not decrease my faith in its beauty, its divinity. You must realize that principle can not be degraded by personalities, Mr. Bosten?

If there is any degradation, it happens to the personalities."

"That's clear enough. But it seems to me, Mr. Freely, that if your church is in fact the Kingdom of God on earth,—assuming there is a God who concerns himself minutely with human affairs—its power and influence should be greater. It should be much freer from hypocrisy and ignorance than it is.'

Peter intended his words should convey a challenge. He wanted to rouse this intellectual member of Noel's church to aggressive action. But the face he saw before him became sad, instead of flaming; and the look he received was one of sympathy and—it seemed to the agnostic—doubt. He liked Mr. Freely more than ever.

"I am not in the habit of apologizing for inefficiency, in religion or anything else," returned the missionary; "and if I were I should not try it on an intellect like yours. I want to tell you something, Mr. Bosten: I believe you will understand. By the way, you are a Free Thinker, are you not?"

"Yes. Did you just surmise it?"

"I would soon have guessed it; but as a matter of fact Noel Crayne told me about you once. But what I was going to say to you was this: the same questions you have asked me, I have asked myself a thousand times. There are moments when I seem

to be aware of a strange inconsistency in the whole thing. Yet, these doubts pass away. My reason tells me that nowhere is there a people even as far advanced, morally, as we. That, I believe, is a mere statement of fact. We have sinners; but, my friend, we have saints too. There are many of God's sweetest characters in this church."

"I believe you, Mr. Freely. Their companionship exerts a happy influence on myself. There is something about your prayer meetings, so simple and sincere, that draws me. Yet, I keep asking myself, would not these same people be what they are in spite of *any* faith?"

The minister shook his head.

"I am older than you," he answered kindly, "and experience tells me not. Here I have knowledge to support my faith."

"But I thought true faith was not dependent upon knowledge?"

For the first time the preacher hesitated, in thought.

"Faith, of the kind I possess myself, is impossible to define," he said, presently. "It is intimately associated with thought, reason, desire, each of which seems to strengthen it. But, Mr. Bosten, when it first came to me, it came in a flood; sweeping me onward in a strange rush of joy and completeness. I

did not stop to ask what it was. I yielded myself to its heavenly influence, and thanked God for its advent."

"So it was really a thing of the emotions, after all? And therefore, Mr. Freely, in what respect was it different from the other psychological influences that come we know not whence—sometimes at the drama, indeed—and surge through our being?"

The preacher's face lighted up; the sadness faded.

"I am glad you asked that question. I was waiting for it. The true answer to it constitutes the best earthly argument in favor of faith. The difference between this influence and those others you have mentioned, Mr. Bosten, lies in the *desires* it leaves. Your theatergoer leaves his box impressed, perhaps, but unregenerated. A club sandwich and a glass of wine take the moral bad taste out of his mouth. He goes home thinking of the next day's business instead of the truths the playwright has sought to bring home to him. In all these psychologic forces that play upon our emotions there is manifest a tendency to pass. Some of them disappear as swiftly as they come, even leaving misery in their wake. But in this faith of which I have been speaking, the kind that came into my own heart at any rate, there was something vital and lasting; something that sent my

soul in quest of greater things than I had ever known."

For a long time the Kansan was silent. Here, at last, was a thoughtful explanation of the phenomenon he had observed.

He recalled the conversation about moral reform at the Jacobs table, and the transient impression Mr. Jacobs's reference to "the Spirit of God" had left—transient because of a conviction that there was insufficient sincerity behind the words. But now the phrase assumed life again, in the light of Freely's interpretation; and Peter warned his brain that perhaps its analytical methods were indeed, as ostensibly spiritual individuals had told him, carnal and "at enmity against God."

But he subjected even this thought to the "test of incredulity," and looking up suddenly he asked the preacher how he had induced this faith of his, or whether he had encouraged it at all.

"The Lord recognized my honesty of desire," came the answer. "This desire drove me to search the Scriptures, in which I found the statement: 'If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally'; and I took the Bible at its word. I prayed earnestly for light. Finally the light came."

Peter was aware of a sudden reaction within him.

He recalled his efforts to pray, and the sentimental consequences.

"What if you had no faith in prayer?" he asked. "No faith at all in anything having to do with the unknown?"

Mr. Freely, at this, expressed a belief which corresponded with an utterance of Noel's, to the effect that if a heart is honest it will be "led" to have faith in God.

"But this is an assumption, in the final analysis," said Peter; "is it not?"

"From the standpoint of human reason it is," agreed the preacher.

He did not continue with "buts" and "howevers"; but ended at the verb "to be."

"So, as usual," returned the Kansan, as though speaking to himself, "we come to the dividing line."

After a pause Mr. Freely replied, pensively: "Yes, I suppose that's about it."

A moment later he was called to supper by his wife, from outside the tent, and having an engagement with Millie Jacobs, Peter betook himself off.

He had neither appetite for feminine company nor appetizing food, however. He was conscious of restless thoughts and vague longings; and could not forget the half-light of sympathy in Freely's eyes. It troubled—aggravated him.

Being in the same state of mind after supper he went off by himself, down toward the shore. The singing of cicadas in the grove, the sighing of the trees, and the phosphorescent glow of the waters, combined to perpetuate his yearnings. Here, in the semidarkness, the voices of Nature stirred his heart. They seemed to be calling to him, as the lights upon the waves beckoned him, on and on he knew not whither.

"O Christian's God and the God of Noel Crayne," he soliloquized, gazing along the shoreline against which the restless waters splashed, "if there be such a being as you, and if in this puzzling world it is required of us mortals to believe in you, why can not *I* have faith?"

No answer came to him out of the darkening sky, no murmur across the waves. He called in vain to the Unknown.

"Ah," he murmured; "illusion! All is illusion!"

But just then the sound of voices, growing nearer, echoing in the grove behind, drifted upward from the beach. Some of the camp girls were coming toward him, arm in arm for protection against the darkness: an element they feared but which, nevertheless, fascinated them.

Peter wished they would turn up the shell-path and leave him to his reverie; but heedless of his wish

they moved nearer and nearer to the spot where he sat silent and unobserved. It occurred to him to flee; but reflecting that the action might frighten them into a panic, he sat still, in the hope that they would overlook him.

However, they were not thus considerate. With the perversity of innocence they came directly toward him; until finally he had to make his mysterious presence known by a cough.

"Don't be afraid," he called, seeing that his cough had been about as startling in its effects as anything imaginable; "it's only one of the boys from the camp."

"It's Mr. Bosten," he heard one of the number whisper; after which assurance they all approached.

One member of the company, he noticed, hung back a little; and upon her he peered most intently through the darkness.

"Helen!" he cried, softly but tensely. "Is that you?"

The others, so far as he was concerned, had dissolved into the night.

CHAPTER XIV

A GULF BETWEEN

HELEN walked back to camp with the Kansan, allowing the rest of the company to go ahead.

The two of them endeavored to speak in casual tones; but it was apparent to each that the other labored under difficulties. They talked of superficialities, for the time being, since their mutual presence sufficed.

"You see," she explained, "I just arrived by motor with some friends late this afternoon; and as my head ached this evening the girls compelled me to take the air."

"You have probably been studying too much," returned Peter, pensively; and a silence threatening to fall, added: "I heard you were at Princeton."

"It is possible I did overwork a little," she answered.

"What are you going to make of yourself, Helen?" There was no sarcasm in the tone.

"That would be hard to say, Peter."

Her answer did not satisfy him, of course. He wanted her to say that she could never make anything of herself without his aid; yet he knew a girl could not make a statement of this character.

As they came into the camp area the sound of string music became audible, and Peter suddenly realized that Helen Dyke's arrival had put him in an awkward predicament. In a few days' time Millie Jacobs had come to take his attentions, mild though they were, for granted; and considerable trouble would undoubtedly be precipitated if he deserted her for another. Millie's pride would undergo a severe test, as news of this sort rapidly spreads in a camp of young folks; and he would probably be obliged to move out of Arthur's tent.

However, the Kansan reflected, all this was inconsiderable where Helen was involved. If uncomfortable predicaments could win her, how gladly would he seek them!

The group of singers had gathered around Arthur's tent, as was their custom after evening service, and as Peter approached, with the fair Missourian, he was hailed by several of them. Millie then caught sight of him; but instead of calling to him, put down her guitar and almost unobserved, stole out through the rear of her brother's tent, after whispering to him something that evidently excused her in his eyes. Immediately Arthur called to the newspaperman to take up the guitar, which Peter was compelled to do, sorely against his will, by the entreating company.

However, when he got into the spirit of the thing he was rather glad of the occasion to remind Helen of old times. Often he had strummed in the center of a Petit City group, as now; taking his inspiration from dark eyes, the like of which he knew no other individual in the world possessed.

She took her place in the company, beside the girl friends she had deserted on the beach, and soon the Kansan distinguished her voice in the singing. He thought, too, that he could feel her gaze in the darkness; but that may have been only his romantic imagination.

They were obliged to part for the night in the presence of others, which made an exchange of intimacies impossible. Consequently Peter could not accurately determine the state of Helen's feelings. But he allowed no doubts to assail him as he winged his way into a happy dreamland. Nor had these mortal tormentors place within him the following morning.

He rose early and strolled down toward the shore, reveling in the glory of a Jersey sunrise. The sounds and scents of Nature thrilled his being with a happiness that is only possible to a lover—and a youthful one. The suntrack over the waters eastward was a golden pathway leading to Happiness, and he was about to set out upon it with sure feet. There was

room for but two thereon, to begin with; but as it neared the horizon the path widened, making way for many feet.

So like the pathway of a full life, thought the Kansan. Two true lovers began it, confining their interest to each other, oblivious of the world; but as they advanced their affections included children, faithful friends, blessed memories.

The sight of a boathouse down along the shoreline gave Peter an idea. He would invite Helen to take a canoe trip with him. They might carry lunch along, and spend a whole day on the water.

This plan, indeed, he was able to carry out. Fortune favors everyone at some time or another. Peter doubted the possibility of such happiness until he felt the canoe move under him, saw the retreating shore,—and a familiar figure in the stern. It had seemed too good to be true: but it *was* true.

He did not philosophize upon it, however, just now. His mind was too full of Helen to admit of abstract thoughts. It was one of those times when there is no sorrow, no gloom upon earth; only happiness and peace.

So it was with them for hours. He recounted his experiences in the East, casually; making no mention, however, of the bitterness he had carried away with him from Petit City. Neither did she mention

this thing; but spoke rather of the knowledge she had gained among the professors of learning, and also of the chaff she had rejected.

The inference contained in the word "chaff," that a "child of God" had the power to distinguish "the tares from the wheat," was not lost upon Peter, whose state of feeling began, at once, to undergo a subtle change. He was aware of an element of antagonism against Helen's views. Until this moment he had thought, under the spell of love, that the old wound was healed. But even a few hours had shown him that it still burned.

Peter endeavored to analyze the phenomenon of so sudden a reaction from happiness; and, with the candor to which he had accustomed himself, reflected that he had been presupposing a change in Helen's religious attitude; ignoring the probability of her strict adherence to the ideals, or ideas, that had been the cause of their separation.

Now he must face it. Complete happiness could only be possible in perfect understanding. It were vain to go on deceiving himself like this, through the sunny hours; for evening darkness would come and he must be prepared to meet it.

He felt there was something cruel in dispelling, with a question, the sweet delusion under which she was, evidently, willing to let the thoughtless hours

pass. But it were better to have an understanding out here on the water, where neither of them could walk away in wounded spirit from the other, than to broach the matter in camp.

Thus resolved, the Kansan began his diagnosis, in fear and trembling; a blush mantling Helen's countenance when she realized what he was about.

Nevertheless, she did not beg him to postpone the ordeal.

"Peter," she replied to his question in a subdued tone, "I'm glad you spoke of this. I have been feeling since last night that we were not quite honest with each other. Now the gulf is bridged."

"But is it?" he returned, eagerly.

Her mysterious eyes were holding his.

"I mean," she explained, "that we have surrendered our self-deception, and are going to be frank with each other. The gulf you are thinking of, Peter, can only be closed up in one way."

There was a note of resolution in her voice that told him what he wanted yet dreaded to know. But it was not triumphant. On the contrary, it sounded almost despairing.

After a heavy silence he regarded her with an appealing look.

"Helen, dear," he said, assuming as steady a tone

as possible, "why do you persist in doubting my honor like this?"

"Forgive me, Peter," she answered, "if it seems so to you. But I can not see it in that light. It is a question of faith and duty."

He marshaled the forces of his mind in an endeavor to discover a common ground whereon they might meet.

"Helen," he asked, "has it ever occurred to you that I might pretend to accept your faith, just for the sake of you? That, after all, is an old trick of lovers."

She smiled unhappily.

"You are not that kind of a man, Peter."

"What makes you think so?" he rejoined quickly.

"I know it," she said, emphatically, "just as I know that there is something vital which keeps you from believing in God."

"Then for God's sake," he cried, with a sudden burst of passion, "tell me what this vital thing is!"

The blood had filled his cheeks and his eyes were not the eyes of the ordinary, philosophic Peter.

Helen, too, had colored deeply. Evidently his anger hurt her.

"That is for you to find out," she returned, after a tense pause; "and the only way to do it is by prayer."

"Prayer," he repeated, not angrily now but with subdued scorn. All memory of soul-tranquility experienced in the midst of these peculiar people, of mental inspiration and the wavering of mortal reason, vanished under the spell of heart anguish. He could not bear the thought of endless blank months to come. A vision of his desk at the Globe office rose before him; around it clustered the shadows of city acquaintances, superficial, insincere, and the atmosphere of earth-dust that had always sickened him. This was the existence to which Helen's stubborness consigned him. He resented it; it was not fair.

"You ask me to sacrifice my intellect," he told her. "You demand that I make a fool and hypocrite of myself. There is no act I could perform that would involve more deceit than getting down on my knees, Helen, and praying to a God in whom I can not believe—of whom I can not conceive. Your own preacher, Freely, told me only yesterday that the kind of faith he possessed was associated with knowledge and intelligent conception. But I lack this faculty, if a faculty it is, or this habit, of divine conception. And I can not believe in prayer. Why," he went on, somewhat excitedly, "should an all-wise eternal Father require his earthly children to beg for the things they need? Even an earthly father anticipates the wants of his children. If God, the God in

whom you believe, knows what is for our good why should he withhold it from us? To induce us to flatter him on our knees? To wheedle us into asking for the wrong thing, in our ignorance, and thus make a mockery of prayer? No, Helen, it doesn't appeal to my reason. I can not and will not accept it, because acceptance would only be superficial with me and would brand me a liar and a hypocrite."

This outburst had the effect of bringing tears into Helen's eyes, which softened the Kansan; but when he realized that they were tears of pity, as well as love, he lost patience again and admitted that his day's pleasure was spoiled.

The admission subtly reminded them that they were two mere lovers made of flesh and blood, subject to the whims of Cupid; so they quarreled on technical grounds and returned to camp without having tasted their lunch. There the Kansan was met by Millicent Jacobs, whose rather chilling presence suggested an idea to him. By taking her out in the canoe he and Helen had just left he could accomplish three important things: give Helen wound for wound; forget their disagreement, to some extent; and atone to Millie Jacobs for his temporary desertion. Needless to say the first reason appealed to him most. He had a stronger desire than upon the occasion of their last quarrel, to hurt her. The Kan-

san, filled as he was with hateful pangs, would probably have gone even so far as to humiliate her. While loving her he hated her: such is the inconsistency of human passion.

After considerable coaxing he pursuaded Millie to accompany him. Peter knew he was doing an ignoble thing and hated himself for it; but the tide of his anguish bore him along with such force he had not the power to resist it.

Through the balance of the afternoon he flattered and accepted flattery, playing upon the surface of artificial pleasure, speaking only superficial thoughts. But down beneath the surface there was heavy gloom and a silent chill, as there was in the depths of the waters upon which they drifted. In the back of his mind he meditated sadly upon the gulf that separated him from his love, growing more and more bitter against the Fate that had pitted itself against him.

While Millie thought he was admiring the light floating clouds, he questioned this god of Noel Crayne and Helen Dyke; challenging him, indeed, to come out in the open and make himself known.

"I will not fawn upon you," said Peter's soul, "and coax you to perform a duty that is yours to do—if you be as great and loving as earth supposes. But I demand of you what is just, what is right and rea-

sonable. Believers would call this sacrilege, blasphemy, and threaten me with fire from heaven for such recklessness: but I am not afraid: my intelligence forbids such fear. If you really exist, god of these peculiar people, why do you not make yourself known to me? Am I not as honest at heart as Helen Dyke? Am I not *more* honest than men like Thomas and Arthur Jacobs?"

Peter waited for an answer, but it did not come; and gradually he felt his heart harden against what he termed "illusions." Always he had held them in mental contempt, but now he hated them with a personal heart-hatred.

"They have come between me and my happiness like a mountain of granite," he murmured—conversing on the tip of his tongue with Millie Jacobs the while. "They have made an egotist of the girl I love. I innocently hoped college life would have made a change in her views; but instead of disillusioning her, knowledge has strengthened her irrationalism. This is not surprising, I suppose. I have not reckoned with the full power of this 'faith' of theirs, that's all. It has encompassed the reason of deeper thinkers than Helen. There is Freely, for instance. He has a brain, that man; and yet he can not convince my intellect that his faith is logical. That argument of his about the 'desire to do good' does

not hold, after all. Have not *I* a desire to do the right? Yet I have no faith in their god, nor have I entered 'the fold' as they call it. My desire is just as strong as theirs, too, in spite of their assumptions.

"Why, they are egotists, all of them; the greatest egotists in the world. Their form of religion may be higher, according to Christian standards, than any other; but since religion is all a delusion, the higher the form the stronger the delusion. That's it!"

The thought was convincing to the Kansan's mind, and he knew that its advent marked the disappearance of his sympathy for Noel's church.

"Their doctrines have defeated my love," he mused. "Why should I deceive myself into thinking them, to any extent, desirable? My sentiment for these sincere but deluded Christians has been leading Reason astray. Let me get back to the Logical—I'm done with this emotional business!"

Consistent with his new viewpoint, which was, perhaps, the old one renewed, Peter made an excuse to go back to Ladner the following day. This time he bade Helen Dyke farewell, but his eyes communicated no message to hers.

Began a period in the Kansan's life that was hard to endure. He had no longer even a desire to be diverted. Invitations from the Jacobses were systematically refused. After work he sat in his room,

brooding, or walked along quiet streets in quest of forgetfulness.

The routine of his daily occupation was more welcome than it had ever been, for the reason that he had no immediate ambition. Even the desire to write, for the sake of writing, had forsaken him. He "doped out," in "shop" parlance, paragraphs and essays on various local or general subjects; but his typewriter carried him along mechanically, and he paid more attention to style than substance.

"You're getting down to something substantial now," observed the editor and proprietor one day. "Soon you'll be able to dress up Nothing to look like something. That's the real mission of a newspaperman."

Cynicism of this nature added a little spice to the Kansan's life, and the use of carefully selected profanity began to appeal to him. Swearing was, in the last analysis, an art. One must guard against excess, however; otherwise the desired result could not be attained. Just as the overstatement of an argument dulled its fine points, so did the too enthusiastic utterance of permissible curses render them less effective.

Peter made a discovery, some weeks after the reunion, that tended to strengthen his conviction that

religion, at its best, was but self-deception. He was covering a suicide case in the slums of Ladner when he learned that the victim had taken his life because of poverty. This was no novelty in modern city life, and the newspaperman would probably have passed it by as a commonplace event, had not a friend of the deceased indiscreetly mentioned an incident leading up to the suicide: namely, a brutal effort to collect rent: which involved none other than Thomas T. Jacobs.

Millie's father, it developed, was the owner of a series of tenements, and recognized to be as severe a taskmaster among the poor as any rich man in town.

So this was the kind of men who championed the cause of an imaginary god; who consigned "unbelievers" to a "lesser glory" in the next world than themselves; who paid into the church treasury money extorted from the poor, and soothed their conscience in prayer and "worship"?

"Ay," he concluded, "and their belief is responsible, to a great extent, for their hypocrisy. Without it they would be driven to their reason and their conscience, elements of their being that illusory faith destroys. Without the salve of prayer they might feel a humanitarian smart occasionally.

"If their church is not responsible for their actions.

why does it tolerate them? Why does it take their tainted money?

"If I had been Arthur Jacobs,—self-deceived, dishonest, insincere,—Helen Dyke would have believed in me because of my professed faith; but being too honest for self-deception, I am discarded. Well, so be it. I am satisfied."

As the months passed, Peter began to take an interest in literature again. He put old associations out of mind, even dropping his correspondence with Noel; and chose to live independently of what he called "sentiment."

"As Ibsen would say," he mused, "I shall be complete within my own life: I shall be Myself."

The routine of the Globe office began to pall on him, however, now that the East ceased to divert him; and a longing for the plains, the atmosphere and sunshine of the Golden West, rose up in his heart.

One late-autumn morning he approached the "chief" unceremoniously and held out his hand.

"Good-by," he said, "I'm off."

"You're off? What's the matter with you—are you crazy? Do you mean you're off your dot?"

"Maybe that's it," he replied, without a smile. "Anyway, I'm sick of this game. Pacing the pavement and writing silly articles about senseless subjects has ceased to appeal to me. The West is call-

ing, and I must go back. Guess I'll free lance it."

The editor tried in vain to suppress profanity.

"I hope you starve to death," he declared, along with an unprintable list of nouns and adjectives.

"Most likely I shall," said the Kansan; "but I'd just as lief do that as dry rot. So long, chief."

CHAPTER XV

THE FREE LANCE

THE events of five years of the Kansan's life, a life peculiarly susceptible to psychologic changes, must now be crowded into small space. An existence of half a decade might not mean much to certain temperaments; but Peter's was an extraordinarily restless one. His ambition was great, and his powers of physical endurance were considerably below the average. The editor at Ladner had often told him that he "carried too much current" and would "blow out a fuse some day" if he did not restrain his energies.

In this recitation of five years' happenings, no adequate conception of the mental experiences can be given. These are more truly "the experiences of life" than physical goings and comings. Just as the mind can travel a billion times faster than the body, so do mental occurrences mean infinitely more than physical. Nor are they to be described in terms of years, for they have no time limitations.

There are minds that journey a greater distance in one week than others do in a year. A whole lifetime of the usual psychological experiences may, for some intellects, be undergone in a very few years. . . .

After leaving Ladner the Kansan, with a hundred dollars in his pocket, set out for the West. He had no notion of stopping off at Petit City, nor of visiting his uncle on the Kansas farm. Old friends and scenes would tend to rouse memories and reflections that he had succeeded, to some extent, in quelling. Peter's one desire now was to do something worth while as a free-lance writer, and anything that threatened to interfere with this ambition must be resisted.

At Chicago he took a Denver train that would pass through Petit City, Missouri, about midnight. Thus the temptation to disembark was minimized.

There was a long daze of dreams and passing things: cities, towns, plains, waters and forests: after which he found himself east of Denver in a prolific grain section of Colorado. One of the little towns, a place named Nestleton, appealed to him because of its name and the fact that it was situated some distance from the railroad station, so he got off the train there, with his baggage, which included a typewriter, and looked around. A breeze from the mountains, shining to westward, filled his lungs; and the hard-headed Peter had a foolish impulse to drop a tear or two on the station platform. It was a peculiar sensation, composed in equal parts of happiness and sadness.

"I'll get back my old vim in this sweet air," he murmured, as he walked toward the village, his baggage having been sent on to the hotel.

His plans were all laid. Next day he would find himself a room in some quiet home, and settle down to his writing. With the ninety dollars he would have left, after paying his hotel bill, he could live for several months, by economizing; and if his "stuff" did not sell, at first, there was always work to be found on the farms round about.

He succeeded in engaging a room for two dollars a week, and his landlady, an ignorant, superstitious, good-hearted soul, told him he could get meals at the only restaurant in town, a Chinese lunch room, "right cheap."

The first week his living expenses were as follows: room rent, $2.00; meals $1.75; laundry 0.25; candy 0.15; total, $4.15. At this rate, Peter figured, he could exist for 21 weeks, without selling anything. But he must make an allowance for stamps of at least $1.00 per week; which, at the present rate, would limit his existence as a free lance to 17 weeks, two more of which would probably disappear in incidental expense—hair cuts, et cetera.

Clearly, he must not eat so much. The candy, a craving for which he had always possessed and which seemed to satisfy him where others wanted to-

bacco, must go; and he must never, on any occasion (except the selling of a manuscript), eat more than twenty cents' worth per day. Also, he must not be so particular in the matter of laundry.

He figured away until he had hit upon a basis of daily expenditure that would prolong his free-lancing existence to at least eighteen weeks, calamities barred; allowing for postage of fifteen cents a day.

Now, Peter was not a novice in the "writing business," and did not cherish false hopes. He had seen too many clever men starving in New York as "hacks," to expect fame and fortune in a few months. If he could only manage to keep body and soul together for a year, by writing stories and articles that appealed to himself, he would be satisfied. He knew he did not "turn out" the sort of "stuff" that appealed to the "ninety per cent"—that class of the public which demanded crude sensation—and that it would be much harder for him to make money as a free lance than it was for mere "pot boilers" who wrote "thrillers" "by the yard." Peter realized that had he retained his position in Ladner he could have sold perhaps more stories and articles "on the side," had he applied himself and consented to "manufacture" the kind of sentiment most in demand, than he would do here in Nestleton, where all his time went into the work. But he also realized that in the

East his style would never have developed any individuality, nor would his mind ever have been able to rise to the heights it might reach here in the mountain air, with no routine and no sordid environment to weary it.

Since first conceiving the desire to be a "writer"; that is, to be able to express the thoughts within his brain that clamored for expression; he had passed through various stages of disillusionment regarding the literary profession. At first he had thought newspapermen happy mortals, beings to be admired and imitated if possible. But association with them had convinced him that they wrote not their own thoughts as a rule, but the thoughts of their newspaper, their employer. The longer they remained with a journal, the less individualistic became their writings. The daily grind of cut-and-dried work devolving upon them killed not only their originality but their ambition, in the end. Most of them were cynical upon the subject of literature. "There ain't no such animal," a Park Row "cub" had remarked to him one day. "At least he doesn't thrive in America. The fellows who succeed in the game these days are those who measure their stuff by the column, at so much per; not by the eye of intellectual scrutiny. Pick the best sellers to pieces and you find a mess of

sticky sentiment with a lolly-pop stuck in the middle."

Away from the "money-seekers" and the inconsistent cynics, who lacked the initiative to forsake what they claimed to despise, Peter hoped to find thoughts within himself, untwisted by exterior influences, that would be worthy of expression. Here in Nestleton, if anywhere in the world, Nature would lend her inspiration. The ever-brilliant sunshine, the singing mountain breeze, the peace and mystery of early morning and moonlit night—surely these were fitter companions to a reflective mind, than the artificial surroundings of a modern city.

His first fortnight's work on the typewriter convinced the Kansan that he must have more speed. So he wrote to a business college in Denver for a copy of their "touch method" book of instruction; and when it arrived, set to work to learn the art of typewriting without looking at the keys. There were twenty lessons in the book, upon which the student was supposed to spend twenty days at least; and success could only be attained by strictest adherence to the rule forbidding the typist to even glance at the keyboard. While learning the position of the keys, one must keep one's eyes on a chart. This rule, of course, made it impossible for Peter to typewrite any of his writings for a period of twenty

days; but, even so, he did not allow his six hours' daily practice of the touch method to interfere with his literary labors. It was his custom to arise at six o'clock every morning, Sunday included, take a brisk half-hour's walk, eat his five-cent breakfast, and be back to work by seven.

Ordinarily he worked from seven o'clock until twelve, and from one until five. Between five and six he exercised in the open; devoted half an hour to supper; and read or studied from six-thirty until ten, sometimes taking half an hour off to write a poem, or the beginning of one.

But now that touch-typewriting was to be learned, he must put in more time, and temporarily give up his evening study. So he rose at five o'clock in the mornings, stealing an hour from sleep, and divided his time so that really only two hours out of the regular day were sacrificed to the machine.

At the end of twenty days he had not only mastered the touch method but accumulated a heap of articles and stories written with pencil in scribblers. He had brought a pile of bond paper from Ladner, but it was fast disappearing; and he dreaded the day when he should have to invest in more.

The typing of the accumulated writings increased his speed on the machine. By the time they were finished he had completely overcome his desire to

look for either letter or figure on the keyboard, and could do much faster work than he had ever done by "sight."

His experience with the touch-typewriting book of instruction made Peter feel that he possessed latent powers capable of strong and varied development. How many of us, he thought, could accomplish really great things if we only tried hard enough?

Instead of slaking his thirst to succeed as a writer, each day's toil seemed to increase it. Every finished story and article inspired him to write something stronger. At first he feared this appetite for labor was artificial and would wear off; but as the weeks passed he came to the conclusion that healthful life and exercise and the absence of uncongenial surroundings, were responsible for his new energy, and that it would last.

When a given writing was finished he invariably felt a thrill of pleasure.

"You may come back, old man," he would say, addressing his "creations" as though they were animate, "but I will send you out again and again; because you represent a certain limited phase of my mental and physical existence, and you are therefore, in some degree, worth while. Yet were not "assigned" to me by a city editor; your spirit was not

dictated by a business or political system. You are my own honest views, in plain language, and I congratulate you, old chap, on your existence. Nothing but fire can destroy you. When I am dead you may lie unpublished; but you will *exist*. For you have been created, and in this universe there is nothing ultimately destructible. Even though you *are* burned up, you will still exist, in spirit form; for a mind has shaped you and released you in the cosmos, whence you can not escape."

Peter formed the habit of speaking to himself: talking to his soul, he called it. On his long walks he would start an argument between two given mental faculties and, standing aside, as though he were a number of personalities, watch the result.

His work, at this period, seemed to fill his life entirely. Noel, Helen and others transiently occupied his mind, of course; but they were invariably forced out, to make room for an Idea of some sort, which the writer deemed worthy of elaboration.

His sentimental nature was fed with imaginary adventures. Were he conscious of a longing for the companionship of woman, as poor mortal man is prone to be at times, he created a dream-creature to divert him. His youthful yearning for real romance was appeased in the creation of the unreal. Such is the nature of a genuine, dyed-in-the-wool "writer."

As more than one novelist has said, his real existence lies in his brain-creations; the material world outside is to him a thing illusory. This sounds like fiction and pretty speeches, but it is a commonplace truth. Doubtless it is not conceivable to some minds—and possibly they are the better off!

The Kansan suffered the pangs of all whole-hearted free lances, during his winter in Nestleton. Back came the manuscripts as methodically as they went out.

It seemed incredible to him, in spite of his Eastern experience in journalism, that not one of a hundred stories and articles should be accepted. He had prepared himself for just this contingency; but there is no genuine preparedness for disaster where hope lingers. Expectation and realization are two different things.

Peter knew that these writings were by far the best he had ever done. Many an editorial of his had the Ladner *Evening Globe* printed, which was amateurish compared with these endeavors.

"But they said what the editor wanted said," he reflected, in disgust. "I was only paid as a carpenter is paid: for fitting the material together. Bah! these magazines don't want originality. Least of all do they want truth. Only one thing appeals to them: Sensation. Let a story be crude, unoriginal,

demoralizing—anything: so long as it is sensational. These editors might just as well sit beside a vat of morphia, with a syringe in their fingers, and give each subscriber an injection as he comes along. Thrills are what he wants; unintellectual, fleshly thrills; and that would give them to him."

Having crowded two or three years' ordinary brain-work into three months, and accomplished nothing tangible (except the innumerable packages of manuscript), Peter suffered a reaction against what he called "modern journalistic conventions." The policy of the magazines disgusted him. They were a weight on the back of intellectual progress. They needed a scourging, and—why did they not get it?

"Because," he mused, "a lot of starvelings like myself depend on them for daily bread. But I *don't*. I'll show them I don't!"

So in place of the old inspiration, now lying dead beneath a heap of long, fat envelopes, there came to the Kansan a new one. He would write only material that tended toward reform. This, after all, was a thinker's mission; the only work worthy of one who desired to be among the supermen.

As this conviction settled upon him he was conscious of a subtle gratification that his sentimental, casual efforts had failed.

"I might have been trapped into devoting my energies to this stuff," he soliloquized, walking in the face of a setting sun. "The gold might have tempted me, as it has the rest. Why, when I come to think of it, there is nothing really vital in what I have written so far. It contains philosophy, true enough, but it lacks direction. There is so much to accomplish in this muddled world that it's idle to spend our time merely saying smart—even thoughtful—things. I must put *life* into my work. I must attack what is ignoble; show myself unafraid of the powers that be; smash their miserable idols, and do things worth while. I have seen enough insincerity and hypocrisy in the world to make a rebel of almost anyone. I shall write about that of which I am informed, and not mince matters. First of all I shall aim a few articles and stories at the sensation-loving public. Maybe their sheer boldness will strike those poor victims, the editors. By Jove,—I believe that's an inspiration!"

With all his heart then, undiscouraged and unadvised by the pile of old manuscripts under his writing table, the Kansan set to work as a literary reformer. He could scarcely get his thoughts down fast enough, in spite of his growing speed on the machine. Some of them came so flaming hot from his brain, and contained sentiments so fearlessly

"radical," it is a wonder, perhaps, that they did not burn up the paper upon which they took form.

For days and days the writer ground out this class of stuff. So enthusiastic was he in its creation that he grudged the time spent in sleep. However, knowing the ways of his stomach and nervous system, he did not attempt to do with less than eight hours' rest each night.

Although his store of wealth was dwindling alarmingly, he bought five dollars worth of stamps in one reckless week and deluged the mails with packages containing castigations of the slush-seeking public and their dupes the publishers.

But ere long, these, like the harmless stories and articles previously submitted, began coming back. How Peter longed for sight of but one short thin envelope! Was it possible that he had been writing like mad for over four months and had not yet received a check?

At last, when his disgust knew no bounds and he was contemplating an excursion among the farms surrounding Nestleton, the thin letter came. It contained the following message from an editor, whose signature was not stereotyped on a rejection slip, but actually written in ink at the bottom of the letter.

"*Dear Sir:*" he read, striving to control the twitching nerves of his fingers: "Your article entitled

'Wheels that move backward' has considerable merit, but we can not accept it unless you grant us the privilege of revision. I appreciate your desire to aid in making journalism a better vehicle for truth; but must say that, with all respect to your views, I can not see where mere words have any appreciable significance in actual reform. What the people are and what they want is determined by conditions too potent to be influenced materially by speech. The habits of society have been formed in the intricate and laborious processes of life; and we can not hope to change them with a breath.

"However, as there is a certain sparkle to your article, I shall be glad to have it for our May issue, provided our rate of one cent a word for such material is satisfactory to you, and we are granted the privilege of revising it somewhat."

By looking up his notebook of "manuscripts dispatched," Peter ascertained that the article in question was about eighteen hundred words in length, and would therefore bring him eighteen dollars. Assuming that he would be paid upon acceptance he sent the editor a telegram (to save time) granting him the rights desired, and in less than a week received another letter stating that the article had been reduced to fourteen hundred words and would be paid for *upon publication.*

It was now the end of March, and the last of Peter's money had disappeared. He had, moreover, persuaded his landlady to wait a week on the room rent; and was out of both stamps and writing paper. His situation looked anything but promising, in fact.

"I guess there's something the matter with my brain," he said to himself, a day of two after receiving the reply to his impetuous telegram, as he sat on the edge of his cot nursing an aching head. "I'm such a hopeless dreamer I'll never be able to navigate in this world of money grubbing, stomach feeding and soul crushing."

He walked several miles out into the country, pondering over his predicament, wondering what he had better do. Would he be able to stand the physical strain of plowing?

While musing that it was about time good fortune favored him a little, he was overtaken by a farmer whom he impulsively asked for a job.

To make a long story short, he got it. However, a week's labor almost laid him up. Certainly it "laid up" his inclination for that sort of toil; and was, perhaps, the strongest factor in sending him cityward once more.

Denver it was at first; later, Butte, Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver.

There came a long period when the Kansan had

no inclination to write. Always he picked up some hobby as a substitute; once it was a cornet, another time a mania for the study of anatomy; and so on. Of course, he had periodical reactions toward the Muse. At one time he wrote a whole volume of verse about a girl he had seen in a field, only for an instant; and on two other occasions he built long stories around an old man and a tired-looking mother, respectively. But he did not pursue the free-lance "game" systematically. When he chanced to sell a story or article he spent the money in travel or gave most of it away to creatures less fortunate than himself.

He worked for six different newspapers, off and on (mostly "off"), during four years; in which time he executed a lot of "side" writings, some of which he never submitted—others were lost in the mails. He enjoyed the sensation of seeing one of his own plots appear in a certain Eastern magazine, some months after the manuscript had been rejected. There was no mistaking its identity.

"The poor hacks," he laughed; "they've even got to steal for a living. Well, I'm better off than they are, at that. Good luck to you, boys! May the Muse reward you.... However, I hold you no ill feeling. We are all dupes together. Egotists of the first water. We think our little thoughts and demand their publica-

tion, as though they were worth while. Why, *nothing* is really worth while in this world. Everything is earthly, sordid. I'll be glad when it's all over."

This soliloquy, delivered to the darkening waters as he stood on the docks in Portland, characterized Peter's state of mind during an indefinite period.

He still thought and wrote along the lines of reform, voicing opinions that were called "Socialistic" and "ultra-radical"; but he seemed to do so without much heart. The words of the sophisticated Eastern editor who had accepted his first article of a revolutionary nature, kept recurring to his mind: "What the people are and what they want is determined by conditions too potent to be influenced materially by speech." The world was in a rut. It needed something more than human reformers could confer upon it.

The Kansan became increasingly cynical in his habits of thought. The articles he condescended at times to write, savored more and more of what was called "radicalism." He despised social conventions, human pretenses, and did not attempt to disguise the fact. He hated religion, now, where formerly he had merely held it in contempt.

The theater was his chief pastime. The playwrights, it seemed to him, had greater breadth of

vision than the majority of self-appointed leaders of thought.

It was the last week of his sojourn in Seattle, while attending the theater, that he had an experience worthy of mention.

He had been attracted there by an announcement that "The Prince of Pilsen" had been revived, with the original company; and attended in hope of seeing Adele Cressy. Not that he had any particular desire to renew his acquaintance with her, or anyone else, for that matter; but he found it diverting to yield to his curiosity.

Not being in the "orchestra" he did not have a program and consequently was unable to anticipate the players. However, as they came on the stage Peter recognized most of them as members of the cast that had entertained him in Ladner, four years previously. Nor was Miss Cressy missing.

"Well, well," he muttered, leaning over the gallery railing, "so it's the same old Adele! She doesn't seem to have changed a bit."

However, an interview with her later in the night, changed his opinion. She had learned to drink, among other things; and had lost much of her former sincerity of look and speech.

The change in her saddened the Kansan, in spite of his cynicism. He tried to make himself believe

that this natural phenomenon of life meant nothing to him; but he scarcely succeeded.

As they sat together at a little table in one of the fashionable cabarets, he yielded to the whisperings of something within him, and drew her into intimate conversation. She refused, at first, to go below the surface of old memories; but gradually he made his way into her heart, and discovered, to his great surprise, that she had really loved Noel Crayne after all; sacrificing many of her ideals only upon being convinced that she must sacrifice him.

Peter saw tears of sorrow and regret flow from stenciled eyes, beneath the gaudy glow of a cafe lamp, and heard amid the din of frivolity the penitent voice of a woman whose life had been as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal,—contrary too, to the truest wishes of her innermost being.

"O fools," he murmured, gazing about him pensively, "do you really care for this glare and jangle, or are you deceiving yourselves, as this girl here is deceiving herself, as all of us are deceiving ourselves?"

She raised her glass, the diamonds still shining in her eyes.

"To our old loves," she said, "however they have gone."

But Peter seemed incapable of raising the liquid to his lips.

"Adele," he returned, "I beg leave to amend your toast a little. Let's drink to the loves of others, since we've had none ourselves."

Forcing a smile, she drank to this.

CHAPTER XVI

ILLUSIONS OF LIFE

IT WAS in Vancouver that the Kansan first admitted to himself that his health was noticeably failing. Frequent headaches convinced him that the trouble lay in his nerves, so, instead of consulting a druggist or other administrator of drugs, he interviewed an osteopath.

The latter told him he was a neurasthenic and had become so as a result of continued mental strain. "You are organically intact," was the diagnosis, "but your nerve cells have been impoverished through excessive thinking and possibly fretting."

"I've nothing to worry over, Doctor," protested Peter; "so it can't be that."

"It must be something of the nature," persisted the osteopath. "You've just told me you were a writer, haven't you? Besides, I can see by your face that you are a student. You have too much head for the bodily vitality you possess. I have met your kind before.

"You will have to take a rest, Mr. Bosten. That's the only cure. I can help you to some extent; but what's the use of my renewing your vitality if you keep draining it off like this?"

Peter took some treatments and promised to be more considerate of himself; but he had to earn enough money to live on, and the only kind of work he could do was that which seemed to have very little market value, and must therefore be performed in large quantities—brain work. At the time of his interview he was engaged on one of the local papers, working out a series of articles to prove Canada had not made a mistake by defeating reciprocity in 1911. The editor was exacting as well as penurious, and every dollar to the hack represented drops of sweat, if not nerve fluid.

The treatments undoubtedly helped him, but their effect was neutralized by his daily toil. It seemed to Peter that he burned up thrice the vitality in a given task that the majority of his fellows did. He could not enter into anything half-heartedly. His life, he was beginning to believe, would not be a long one; but at any rate it should never be said of him that he had wasted time. He might have chosen easier means of livelihood than journalism, he knew; but the monotony of a brainless, time-killing occupation; the routine of a mean system for securing money alone, would have worn him out as surely as did excessive labor in the more or less congenial vocation of journalism, or "literature" as he liked to call it in his ambitious moments.

He still had occasional dreams of becoming, at some time, a successful free lance; particularly after indulging in a good cup of coffee or a rare glass of other stimulant; but such dreams were growing less and less frequent.

His desire for the ordinary pleasures of life was blunted these times. He believed it would sharpen again, after a while, under some natural reaction; but even though it did not he could be tolerably content. Not content, either, he mused: it was not his nature to be content: but—well, he could live on and take a certain interest in this existence.

He was still in Vancouver when the World War broke in Europe; and it must be admitted that the intellectual part of him experienced something resembling pleasure in the event. He saw the men and women around him in a new light. A new interest in life was unexpectedly afforded him.

Soldiers began to parade the streets, and there were demonstrations against the "enemy's sympathizers." Flags appeared in peaceful places, wild reports were circulated, most of the people and all of the newspapers went mad.

Soon the Kansan lost his artificial pleasure in the phenomenon, however. Newspaper reports became convincing; statements were made by men high in authority that the carnage would go on for at least

three years. The hatred deepened, the madness grew. Blood ran in rivers, and men over all the earth began to tremble.

In a few weeks Peter left off reading about the thing. His soul was sick with it. His editor wanted him to write pro-British articles and short stories about the conflict; but he complained of his headaches and asked for lighter work and less pay. The truth was, he had no heart to champion either side of the slaughter. He could not help thinking of the Prussian mothers and children; even of the men themselves, the dupes of a diabolical doctrine.

A fortunate circumstance, at this time, afforded him a much-needed opportunity for a rest. He sold a story to an American magazine for one hundred dollars and was paid on acceptance. Under other conditions he might have simply quit work and taken his leisure. But the war was upon his mind and he had to express his convictions regarding it. So he resigned his newspaper position, engaged a room at two dollars and fifty cents per week, and, instead of resting, set to work on a war novel.

He wrote sixty-five thousand words in fifteen days, laid the manuscript aside for a week, during which he nursed an aching head and slept most of the time; then spent another ten days revamping and retyping the story. He made three copies of it, an original

and two carbons; and these he began peddling among the various periodicals, daily, weekly and monthly, in town.

The universal verdict was to the effect that "Americans coming here with pro-German views like this ought to be kicked out of the country." Peter knew he had dealt fairly with the subject; if there had been any bias at all, it had been in favor of the Allies. He had merely constructed an argument against war in general, and the injustice arising from the warring spirit in particular; but these red-blooded champions of the people's and the country's cause fired up, every man of them, at his story; and wanted to have him thrown into the Pacific Ocean.

The conclusion Peter came to was that Canada, or any other nation going to war, fought because it wanted to fight. Neither an individual soldier nor a nation flew at an imaginary adversary's throat out of a love of "liberty and truth," but from love of "glory" and self. It was the lust of blood, not the ideals of mind, that precipitated war.

Technically, he argued, Canada and the Allies were justified in blocking Germany's muderous game. But no Britisher or other supporter of the allied cause was justified in proclaiming war a beautiful thing, or in resenting philosophical denunciations of

the carnage, on the grounds of "loyalty." It was all rotten hypocrisy.

If the combatants of either side wanted to slay their "enemies" let them do so. A few millions of lives made little ultimate difference in the affairs of the world anyway. But let them not deceive themselves and try to deceive others into thinking their work laudable and glorious.

Their pretensions were like the blatant notes of their band music to the Kansan. They jarred on his ear and his soul. Finally he packed his grip, throwing the war story manuscript in as carelessly as he did his shirts, and left for "home."

Once among Americans again, however, he suffered a reaction in favor of the Allies. Here, in various directions, was sentiment that excused the Kaiser in his conquest plan. Peter hated it and the hypocrisy that fostered it.

"All fools!" he cried, almost in a passion. "Let them fly at each other's throats and murder—murder! The lust is in their blood. They are mad for carnage and death. So God give it to them!"

His headaches showed no signs of leaving, and he was aware of a growing disinclination for mental effort. He still had some money, but it would not last long; and after it was gone—what? He had no energy at all left, it seemed.

A Portland newspaper friend secured him passage to San Francisco, shortly after his return to the States; otherwise he believed he would have contemplated suicide. If one did not like one's house, why not move out of it? This old question had been tormenting him for nights prior to his securing the ticket to California.

Once on board the 'Frisco boat, however, he felt better in body and spirit. Exasperated with the pains of his nervous system he had resorted to the use of asperin, a drug that was becoming alarmingly popular among tired men and women. Peter realized the danger this practice might involve him in; but it did not worry him. He felt that even death would be preferable to the moods that had been sitting upon him of late. After all, why fear the dissolution of this house of clay? There was another existence beyond, probably. And if not—would not eternal sleep be welcome?

A tall, well-dressed gentleman, in clerical garb, approached the dreamer as he reclined against the deck railing.

"I beg your pardon—but aren't you Mr. Bosten?"

Peter frowned, for he too readily recognized the unwelcome one. It was Reverend Theodore Rollins. Peter consciously associated the word "Reverend" with him now, although he knew the preachers of

"Noel's church" did not allow it to be attached to them.

A desultory conversation ensued, the Kansan taking very little interest until he discovered that Rollins was now traveling and lecturing against the church in which he had been so long a pastor.

Here was a new phase of the psychology of religion.

He asked the gentleman how the change had come about in him, and was informed, in a wordy peroration, of the way "the Lord" had "led him to a fuller understanding of the gospel of Christ" and shown him "the man of sin" in the person of "Milton Stern!"

At mention of a name that he respected, Peter fixed his skeptical eye on the "holy sensationalist" (as he afterwards named him) and began filling up with indignation.

All unsuspecting, however, the worthy Rollins continued his apology, flying, if not in the "face of Providence," at least in the face of trouble.

Suddenly, unable to control himself longer, the Kansan loosed his tongue and told this "funny little champion of the Most High" (quoting a Socialist whom Peter admired), a few things he had never heard before.

"You are not worthy to shine President Stern's

shoes," said Peter, surprised that, after five years of varied struggles in which his soul's welfare had not troubled him much, he should be taking the side of any one religionist against another. "Your poor little brain is so small that if it described a circle about a really original, let alone a lofty, idea, the expansion would drive you insane. Beat it away to your stateroom, or jump overboard or something. In any case don't bother *me* with your infinitesimal existence!"

The next moment Peter regretted his loss of temper, as one usually does after the harm has been done.

"What's the matter with me lately?" he demanded of himself. "I'm becoming so irritable I can't be civil with anyone."

However, in thinking over Rollins's words, he doubted if the rebuke had been strong enough. The idea of a man's swinging on a pivot of hypocrisy like that! How could he reconcile his faith in Jesus Christ with such a mean conception of his fellows and such an exaggerated opinion of himself?

What did these little pretended followers of the great Jewish Prophet know about him, anyway? How poorly their petty utterances compared with the sweeping strength of His; how mean their labors were as compared with His labors!

As he scanned the horizon, which seemed to rise and fall with the motion of the boat, Peter had a repetition of the vision that had confronted him one Sabbath in New York. The White Figure of Madison Square Gardens again rose before his spiritual sight and he saw the waifs gathered about him for protection.

"Oh," he thought, "if only it were possible for *me* to lay my head upon the breast of the Perfect Man incarnate, and realize that there was something more than hypocrisy and delusion in the world, how sweet my rest would be!

"If I could only believe in this heaven of the Christian's, this place of peace and refuge, with what a different aspect life, here and hereafter, would be endowed! But no; I can not do it. I can not forget the littleness of man. We are insects, crawling toward our doom; some of us pompously, others wearily and in pain like myself; but all inevitably. The Black Gates will close on us one day. Let them close on me as soon as they may: I am sick and disgusted with the present aimless, meaningless existence. Unconsciousness, oblivion would be infinitely preferable to this. Here I live without love, without hope, even without mortal ambition of late. I guess I am one of the unfit; I have not survived in the Great Evolution. If there be another state of being,

I shall probably come forth as a sort of tradesman-in-spirit, doomed to an existence of trivial endeavors, soulless, thoughtless, ambitionless. There I shall learn lessons fitting me for one more epoch; and so on ad infinitum.

"Well, well," he sighed, "so let it be. I may rebel against my fate, I suppose; but it will do me no good. I must bow to the inevitable at last, even though I hesitate in doing so just now."

Pursuing these and similar reflections he sank into a state of mental gloom. The horizon of life seemed infinitely darker to him than the sea's horizon, now fading from slate-gray to a heavy blue-black. Though the sun had long since gone down and there was nothing to be seen seaward, he continued to gaze, as though yearning to penetrate the impenetrable. So like Peter!—him of the hungry mind of unbelief.

Came before his mental vision the worldly characters he had best known. Ignorant, grubbing farmers; cunning, penurious merchants; arrogant, egotistical men of "big business"; unscrupulous, scheming politicians; little-brained, self-deluded, self-appointed "leaders" of public thought: all the host of two-legged ants, born from the womb of Eternity but doomed to live but a day—who danced and capered throughout the span of their infinitesimal

existence. Funny little animate specks, so insignificant it took the mind of a man to comprehend them!

Peter knew as he sat there staring into Pacific night, that he had drunk his fill of the liquid, Life; as it tasted to him now, at any rate. He had witnessed the disappearance of so many ideals, encountered so many contradictions in his dreams, and faced the unknowable so long, his soul had lost appetite. What it took some placid souls three score years and ten to achieve: a distaste for human existence: he had achieved in less than thirty.

When he reached San Francisco he found great preparations going on for the Panama-Pacific Exposition. Here there was little thought of war, evidently: the people were entertaining themselves in a different fashion. They were not shooting bombs at one another and destroying cities, it was true; but they were lavishing wealth, labor, and time upon pleasure-idols, to create which the poor and unfortunate of America had been robbed. In Europe the ignorant, the oppressed were being marshaled to fight the battles of their lords and kings; forced to leave their wives and children to take up the sword against unknown and unoffending "enemies"—who were doing the same thing for their lords and kings. But here in America, the land of the free and home of the brave, the under-dog was subjected to

no such indignity. He was merely robbed of the means of earning a livelihood and permitted to remain at home with his family and starve. He was merely obliged to calmly lay down his life in this unheroic, inglorious manner, so that the many kings of America might flaunt their splendor in the eyes of the world. If he chose, he might join an army, indeed: the army of the unemployed: but, of course, in that case he must be prepared to face the militia of whatsoever money-force elected to parade one.

"Hypocrisy; miserable, rancid hypocrisy!" shouted the Kansan, in his soul, as he made his way through the crowds, heedless of the glory of mammon; bent upon securing as cheap a bed as possible for the night.

He walked on and on, as if trying to escape from the noise and glamor. Now and then he turned to look back, but straightway went forward again, not yet satisfied with his distance from Bedlam's center.

By and by he turned up a quiet street, hoping to find a reasonable lodging there. However, there were no "Rooms for Rent" signs anywhere visible; and he was about to retrace his steps when a small church across the way attracted his eye. It bore the name by which "Noel's church" was known.

With the thought that possibly Noel himself might

be pastor here, the Kansan crossed over and read the announcement board.

But the pastor's name, as printed on the board, was unknown to Peter.

Nevertheless, a special announcement written in chalk interested him: "On Sunday evening," it said, "Milton Stern, President of the Church, will be the speaker."

The Kansan's heart grew a shade lighter as he read.

"Well," he soliloquized, "here's something at last that is worth a look-in."

It was now Friday night; and he had enough money to last him a week. So he decided to rest during Saturday and Sunday, and procrastinate the sickening ordeal of job-hunting until Monday. His chief desire, now, was to sleep and forget. The physical reason was nervous debility; the mental—well, who shall say?

He found a little room, as clean as it was cheap, not far from the church; and without ceremony (unless a bath may be so described) went to bed.

Presently the pounding of his head grew less painful, and he dozed off into dreamland. There he wandered by phosphorescent waves with Helen Dyke, and the cicadas sang their song in the darkness. She was weeping, it seemed, and begging him to do some-

thing for which he could not obtain the consent of his mind.

All the agony of love he had known in reality condensed itself into that dream. The perspiration stood out on his forehead, and he awakened, after midnight, acutely conscious of pain.

Then he took another asperin tablet, which soothed away his headache and heartache. He sank again into dreams; but this time it was Adele Cressy with whom he talked, and they were drinking a toast, not to the loves of others, but their own.

CHAPTER XVII

A SERMON ON AMERICA

ON Sunday evening Peter went over to the little church early. He selected a seat near the back and watched the people as they came in. As opening time neared and he saw neither a crowded house nor the President, however, he began to fear disappointment.

But Peter had no sooner formed a resolution to stay and hear whoever might speak, than Mr. Stern's athletic figure was seen walking with businesslike stride up the aisle: and the individual seated directly ahead of the Kansan heard a sigh of relief near by.

After the second hymn, Peter settled back in his seat, upon the heavy arm of which he rested his elbow, and assumed a position best calculated to humor a heavy head.

The President cast an appraising glance upon his audience, as he rose and stood behind the pulpit. His face, it seemed to the Kansan, had grown perhaps a little less aggressive and more thoughtful. His tone, to-night at any rate, was undoubtedly more pensive than as Peter remembered it.

"I think it a fitting time, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters," he began, "to speak about this

country of ours, past and present. This year marks a step in our national development that puts us in the van of nations. We have built a city of fine-stone and metal for the pleasure of looking at it and the gratification of pointing to it. I would remind you, to-night, of the deeper significance of this tendency toward display, which is not a new one, upon the part of our own land and of all the earth."

Already the Kansan was deeply interested. His mind had been working in this same direction, since his coming to 'Frisco.

"Let me carry you back," the speaker continued, "to the early history of America. Come with me to Mexico, Peru and elsewhere to the south of us, among the ruins of civilization upon civilization there. Modern archæologists have made it clear to the world that long before Columbus came to America there were peoples upon this continent possessed of great culture. Not dark-skinned progenitors of the savage tribes Columbus found here; but a white race who knew a civilization equal to that of the Old World at the same period."

Here Mr. Stern quoted from Baldwin, Humboldt and a number of other archæologists and historians, to prove his assertions.

"So you see," he went on, "the Indians were but a degenerate remnant of the cultured races. They

held barbaric sway over ruined cities; over submerged aqueducts and concrete highways,—one of which was at least fifteen hundred miles long,—more ignorant of their own origin than we are. Yet in the traditions of these savage tribes we find hints of the very origin I shall endeavor to establish—Asiatic."

The speaker quoted other authorities, linguists and scientists, until Peter marveled at his own ignorance and that of other Americans, ostensibly "cultured," regarding the ancient history of their own land.

Finally Mr. Stern turned from "profane" to "sacred" history, bringing Bible prophecies and allegories to bear upon his argument. From the "believer's" point of view he adduced unlimited scriptural proof of his contention that the Ancient Americans came from Asia, carried religious records with them, were directed by God just as their contemporaries in the Old World were; kept a history of their own, engraven, in the ancient custom, upon metal plates; and, before their extinction by war, were visited by the Messiah after his resurrection, just as he visited the Judeans.

The speaker wove a fabric in which there were no loose threads, for believers in God. He affirmed that the Almighty was just as capable of issuing instructions to his disciples nowadays as in the past; that

he had done so, in fact, revealing by what men termed "miraculous" means the whereabouts of those Ancient American records engraven upon metal plates.

By the "power of God" these plates had been translated, and the story of human life therein revealed was a warning to the America of to-day.

"My friends," he said, "you may not believe that God is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. You may think it incredible that he should warn moderns, as he did ancients, of their specific sins and aid them in specific difficulties. My remarks to-night may seem visionary, ultraromantic to you. If you do not believe in Christ Jesus and the Bible, I may even sound like a deluded dreamer. But let me briefly recount the story of the fall of those Ancient Americans, as recorded in the translation of the plates I have mentioned, and see if it does not accord with your observations of life, to-day.

"The claim made is that three great civilizations were one time extant upon North and South America. Two of these were contemporaneous with Judean captivity and each other; the third had its origin at the time of Babel.

"When the second and third groups arrived in the New Land they found the ruins of that civilization which was built upon the wanderers from Babel.

"Now the record of all these groups is contained in a book which this church I represent believes to contain the word of God, as does the Bible. I hold the book here in my hand. It has been sorely abused, but not more sorely than the Scriptures which all of you, I presume, accept. Mankind, you know, is ever averse to truth."

The Kansan unconsciously nodded his head. He was thinking of his experience in journalism.

"And this record, my friends, tells how each of those ancient civilizations came to naught through hatred, lust and murder. They set up kings, idols of clay, which they worshiped instead of the God of heaven—even as the nations are doing to-day! The petty causes of these kings they championed, flying at each other's throats as Europe has done within the past few months."

"By Jove!" murmured the Kansan.

"Generation after generation they did this, until their lands lay waste and their cities in ruins. The first civilization utterly perished, about the time of Israel's bondage; their records falling into the hands of the second and third civilizations, and being translated by the power of God.

"But these succeeding peoples, far from learning the lesson of obedience to right and service of God, contained in the said records, began the old folly of

worshiping puppet man; creating kings, images of clay, whose unworthy quarrels they might assume: for, as mortal man has always done, they lusted to slaughter and destroy, even as it is happening to-night in sorry Europe: and after centuries of bloodshed and wickedness, all that remained of them was a dark-skinned remnant, who survived by the mercy of God and for his great purposes.

"Now, my friends, I shall not go into a discussion of the modern revelation of these truths. Suffice it to say that, because of my faith in the unchangeability of God, I find it possible to believe in the divinity of this book and the wondrous way in which the Almighty has given it to us in these last days. And if you will investigate the matter, with an open mind and a sincere desire to find the truth, you will be aided by his Spirit in doing so. You will, I believe, come to see as I do. This may sound egotistical; but if I did not believe this church to be the Kingdom of God on earth, I should not be preaching to you to-night.

"In closing, let me point you to this Exposition, as an instance of man's misconception of right and duty. Our country is burdened with suffering that needs alleviation, crime that needs eradication, ignorance that needs instruction, customs that need reformation. Yet we spend millions of dollars, we

condemn the poor to starvation and the suffering to their woe, in order that we may set up and worship gods of gold and glass. I ask you, my friends, are we materially different from the civilizations upon which archæology has thrown its light; which went down into oblivion through vanity and lust? Have we not a king, King Dollar, who dominates us, takes away our reason, our religion and our humanitarianism?

"They tell me, those who elect to apologize for this gaudy extravagance, that it is educational; that it marks the progress of the race and will stand as a landmark for ever in the evolution of the world.

"But, my friends, let them not speak of 'progress' and 'world evolution' in the face of present facts. Have enlightenment and culture availed to restrain the surging armies? The answer lies before us. I refer you to last night's papers.

"No; we can not be deceived. Advancement in the arts and sciences is not what humanity needs, but *regeneration of soul.*" Mr. Stern laid emphasis on the phrase. "The light that has reached the brain of man must penetrate to his inner being, burn away the selfishness, purify his passions.

"And I believe the gospel of Christ Jesus to be the only power capable of accomplishing this. Civilization may follow civilization, kingdoms rise and fall

for ever, science of man encompass the very skies; but until the Spirit of God enters our hearts and takes up its abode there, there can be no real progress.

"This Exposition may be a landmark indeed. But what story shall it tell to the future? The old, old story of 'man's inhumanity to man'? Ah, my friends, I am afraid so! It is built upon the sandy foundation of mortal vanity; and the record of it or the ruins of it can bear no nobler tale than underlies the foundation of it.

"Nor can the lives of those who established it, and the lives of you and me, my friends, mean any more in the evolution of truth and the universe than the inmost desires of these hearts mean. Unless we have the love of God within us, a genuine yearning for the triumph of honesty and righteousness, our achievements are a shame unto us, and will perish with these temples of clay."

With these words the speaker abruptly closed; and Peter Bosten clutched his palms as a nervous tremor passed through him. He had been keyed up to a high pitch, during the sermon, and, the spell broken, was now experiencing a reaction.

Though the physical spell was broken, however, the spiritual was not. The Kansan sat staring before him; hearing still the President's voice; marvel-

ing at the terrific import of his utterances, their profound significance, their convincing force.

Peter seemed unaware that the audience was leaving. His head rested wearily in his palm, his eyes remained fixed, and he was oblivious of everything—until a familiar voice roused him.

"Hello Mr. Bosten! I scarcely expected to meet *you* away out here."

Mr. Stern was smiling and extending a large hand.

"You do well to remember me," returned the Kansan surprised. "We only met once, Mr. Stern."

"That's true. But maybe we are kindred spirits or something of the sort. I had no difficulty in recognizing you from the pulpit anyway."

Peter wondered why the President had taken the trouble to approach a nonmember and a stranger like this, and why he seemed inclined to linger. There must be many others present who would be happy to monopolize him.

"Mr. Stern," he asked, on the inspiration of an idea, "could you spare me a few minutes to-morrow? I want to have a talk with you."

"Why not to-night?" came the reply. "You might walk up to my room with me, if you care for the exercise."

"That will suit me splendidly. I'll wait for you in this seat."

A few minutes later they left the church together, turning in the direction of Peter's lodging; and as one of the matters he wanted to see Stern about was the Canadian war story, he dropped into his room in passing and got one of the manuscripts.

"After hearing such views as yours to-night," explained the Kansan, "I felt that I had to beg this favor of you."

"My goodness," returned the athletic preacher, "it's no favor on my part. You're giving me a pleasure—doing me an honor. I happen to know something about your literary labors."

This was news to Peter, as his look of astonishment indicated.

"You seem to keep forgetting the intimacy between Noel Crayne and myself," Mr. Stern explained with a smile. "He has gathered up everything of yours he could lay hands on. I doubt if some of it *is* yours—there is such a prolific use of pen-names. But Noel believes it is, and that's enough for him."

Peter felt a lump rising in his throat. In five years he had not written his old friend a line. Yet Noel had not forgotten.

A silence, full of emotion for the Kansan, fell between them; which Peter eventually found words to break.

"I wonder if you'd lend me a copy of this Ancient

American record of which you spoke to-night, Mr. Stern? I confess you have got me interested."

"Surely." The answer was not accompanied by any outburst of religious enthusiasm. Evidently the preacher knew his companion's temperament.

By and by the Kansan asked a favor. He must snatch at straws under present circumstances.

"You doubtless know some of the newspapers in town. I am wondering if your influence wouldn't help me obtain temporary work? I shouldn't presume to trouble you, Mr. Stern; but as a matter of fact poor health has put me in rather a bad way."

The other did not reply at once. Obviously he was weighing his answer.

"Can you drop in on me to-morrow afternoon?" he said. "I'll be better able to give you something definite then."

"Yes, indeed. I appreciate—."

"You say your health is not good?" Mr. Stern purposely interrupted the expression of gratitude. "What's the trouble?"

"Fagged nerves, headaches and all that," replied Peter.

"Then you need a rest, not a newspaper job."

"Also," grinned the Kansan, "I need at least one meal a day and a bed at night."

The President's brow became clouded, and his eyes assumed a light of inquiry and incredulity.

"Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Bosten," he asked, with his square look, and in a tone of unmistakable interest, "that a man who can write as you do, must beg hack work?"

The question warmed Peter toward him, chiefly because it indicated that Mr. Stern had no suspicions of laziness or bad habits, so common in free lances.

"The trouble, I think, has been that I've refused to study popular demands. I haven't made a practice of slinging sentiment of the best-selling kind; and now that I'm up against it I haven't the faculty—even though I temporarily had the desire,—to write it. You'll understand what lines I've followed, after you've read this manuscript here."

Obviously, Mr. Stern was interested. He coaxed the writer to go in and spend the night with him. But reflecting that he had no asperin along, Peter declined, promising to call the following afternoon. As they bade each other good-night Stern took a book from his pocket and handed it to the writer, with the words:

"You'll appreciate the philosophy of it at any rate."

Peter mused, as he walked homeward, on the complexity of human thought and experience. Noel Crayne had asked him to read this same book six

years previously, and although he had promised to do so and intended doing so, the desire had never come to him.

"Then," soliloquized the Kansan, "I was full of life's joy. I knew what love and respect for humanity were. I was appalled by the world's wisdom and achievements, allured by its promises, deceived by its flattery. Now I am sick of it all; the glamor has ceased to attract, the glory has disappeared. I see the littleness of man, rather than his boasted greatness. He is far smaller, even, than he looked from the top of that skyscraper on Broadway. His insignificance, alone, is appalling; his hypocrisy, his egotism—disgusting.

"Evidently this book thinks no better of him than I do. So we ought to agree. I care not what has been said about it. The praise or condemnation of these little two-legged ants—in heaven's name, what does it signify!"

Propping himself up with pillows and easing the pain of overworked nerves by artificial means, Peter began to read the book loaned him.

At the same time Mr. Stern, in his room, was deep in the manuscript that had so offended Vancouver editors a fortnight previously.

Both of them read until long past midnight.

The following morning Peter slept late, and when

he arose, his head, though dizzy, gave him little trouble. He stimulated himself with two cups of strong coffee, at a lunch counter some blocks away, came back to his room for a few more hours' reading, then set out for President Stern's lodging.

The latter greeted him with a hearty handshake, but said nothing beyond: "How are you to-day?"

The Kansan wanted to ask him about the manuscript, but refrained, on second thought, from mentioning it. Doubtless the leader of a hundred thousand church members had other things to occupy his mind. Nor did Peter refer to the book he had himself borrowed, not desiring to make premature comments.

They had been conversing casually a while when suddenly Mr. Stern opened a drawer in his dressing stand and brought forth the manuscript.

"What do you propose to do with this?" he asked, with assumed indifference.

"Nothing," rejoined the Kansan, with a half smile. "I wrote it for the Canadian periodicals and as they refused it I guess the poor thing will suffer the fate of many a predecessor."

Mr. Stern was studying him.

"Are you really serious, Mr. Bosten?"

"Yes. Why not? You don't imagine I *value* it, do you?"

The other's eyes widened peculiarly.

"Why then did you want my opinion about it?"

"Well," said Peter, "I just thought I'd like to have it. Your views coincided so thoroughly with my own that I figured you might find a little diversion in the story, and would probably say things about it that would afford me food for reflection. Reflecting, you know, is about my only pastime."

"And you don't value it much, you say?"

"I value nothing very much, Mr. Stern. Life has lost its spice to me." His tone was solemn, convincing. "This work of my hands and brain means little to me, for the reason that I have no task ahead, now, except mere existence."

Stern leafed the manuscript over thoughtfully. For the moment he had forgotten it was in his hands.

"I'm looking for a private secretary," he said, after a silence. "The one I've had wants to quit me here, now, instead of a month later, as it had been arranged. Would you, I wonder, care to take the position temporarily?"

Peter felt his heart beat faster, on the instant, and impulsively expressed his pleasure at the prospect offered. Before the words were well out of his mouth he felt that he had blundered: he would—among other things—be imposing upon the President, in the present state of health; but Mr. Stern took him up in

a businesslike way, naming the salary attached to the office, and the places whither he was bound.

The arrangement, in fact, was completed almost before the Kansan realized his situation; and then it was too late to withdraw. He would have to do his best. If the work taxed him too heavily he would increase his allowance of asperin.

"I don't want to inspire great expectations," smiled Mr. Stern, by and by, turning the manuscript over on his knee now with a look of conscious scrutiny, "but I have a notion I can place this story."

However, notwithstanding the statement was made in a tone of assurance, Peter felt no thrills. The lure of authorship and "success" had disappeared with all the other glamor.

"In that case," he replied, picking up the miniature of a little girl from Stern's writing table, "I make your daughter a present of the proceeds."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WHY AND WHEREFORE

IN AN eastbound train that had just left Denver, sat President Stern and his secretary in conversation. It was now late in February. Their destination was Le Bois, Iowa, where the coming General Conference would soon convene.

The two had been associated for about three weeks, during which time Peter had found his companion to be a companion indeed. However, the stress of work had been so great, upon both of them, that they had had but little opportunity for recreation, conversational or otherwise.

All the time Peter had been reading and rereading the book loaned him; and now, with several hours of leisure before them, he believed the proper moment to discuss it, had arrived.

One morning the President had, with a grin, addressed his assistant as "Brother"; since which time this form of address had been tacitly adopted between them. It had an unique significance, in their case.

"Brother Stern," the Kansan now began, "this is the first good opportunity we have had of discussing anything. Do you mind if I make some frank confessions and demand a lot of information?"

"Not at all. I've been expecting an onslaught for some time."

"Well, I've been trying to find out just where I stand, and to put my thoughts and feelings into definite form. Besides, I wanted to finish your Book of Ancient America before speaking.

"In the first place, Brother Stern, I want you to know that your San Francisco sermon took hold of me as nothing has ever done. I could not resist the force of it, in spite of my views concerning divinity. If my mind had been so shaped in the beginning, or so trained since birth, perhaps, as to admit of religious belief, your sermon would doubtless have made a convert of me. But, although I marvel at this wonderful system of faith in the God you are representing, and at the sincerity with which you and so many of your people adhere to it, for some reason I can not accept it. I can not conceive of the necessity of baptism by water, for instance; and what you call 'spiritual manifestations' bewilder me.

"From the first time I met Noel Crayne, in the basement of your church at Petit City, and mingled with that earnest congregation of young and old, I felt attracted toward you all. I even wished I could become one of you, without a sacrifice of logic. But, somehow, I was unable to surrender to this faith. It seemed like a victory of sentiment over

sense. I could not conceive of the Creator of the Universe interfering in the petty concerns of mankind. In fact, I could not conceive of him at all.

"Prayer seemed like begging the question or applying salve to the conscience. The religious world seemed to me a whirling sphere of contradictions, assumptions and delusions. That your church represented the highest form of religious life, I believed; but that it was all it claimed to be I could not believe."

The speaker paused; and his companion, with a thoughtful look, remarked:

"I observe that you put all this in the past tense."

"Yes," Peter returned quickly; "but I'm afraid—to be perfectly honest—my convictions are chronic. I have passed through experiences since then, Brother Stern, that have made the whole world look different; that have literally killed my interest in life, on this sphere at least; but I can't seem to comprehend what you call this 'gospel of Christ' yet. That the world needs regenerating, I admit; but that your 'plan of salvation' can effect it, I am unable to believe.

"Tell me, my friend: from your point of view what is wrong with me? Do I, after all, lack sincerity? Why can not I have this thing called Faith?"

The President did not reply directly to the ques-

tion. Instead, with a pensive expression in his eyes, he began to tell of his own soul-striving, before he became actively affiliated with the church.

"The thing that convinced me of the power of this gospel, I believe, was my father's own life. I suppose you know that I succeeded him in the presidency of the church?"

"Yes," said the Kansan; "there aren't many religious or nonreligious people who have not heard his name and something about his work——"

"Either good or bad," came the interruption.

"Yet those who knew him personally invariably spoke well of him," Peter went on. "In spite of the disgrace thrown upon his name by those who were interested in doing so, I believe him to have been a splendid man."

"I like to hear that from a disinterested source," observed the other. "It surely is true. He was undoubtedly a great man, in the true sense of greatness. . . . But, as I was saying, his life was the greatest of all inspirations to me, I think. Being, like yourself, naturally of a skeptical mind, I believe I should have rejected the gospel, from a purely intellectual standpoint, had not father's life gripped me.

"It was a peculiar thing, Brother Bosten. I often look back upon it and marvel. I was a headstrong,

practical-minded, pugilistic sort of individual who absolutely abhorred the sentimental. I was for what is called 'virile life' as opposed to the philosophic. The world to me was a place of intense interest, and men who 'did things' were my little gods. I had no patience with theoretical persons or schemes. My great cry was: 'Deliver the goods first and praise your delivery system afterwards!'

"For a long time I took no interest in my father's work. His religion seemed visionary and impractical to me. In fact, religion of all kinds failed to impress me. I reveled in the thought of universal evolution wherein progress came only to the strong, the 'fittest' to survive. What constituted 'fitness' I did not stop to ascertain. I jumped at the conclusion that it was those attributes, whatever they were, that characterized the survivors.

"This theory, as you can readily see, involved an assumption of the very point in question. The fittest survived, therefore those who survived were the fittest! Fine logic that. The definition of 'fitness,' of course, was ignored. My reason was swept away by my desire to aggrandize man; make him the arbiter of his own fate, the hewer of his own niche in the universe.

"Then, by and by, I began to apply my theory of evolution to my surroundings. I tried to include

the men and women with whom I daily associated, in the circle of fitness. But here I became involved in a labyrinth of paradoxes and contradictions that dizzied me. No matter how scientifically I worked out my application, I found the definition of the *quality of fitness* still in question. This was the elusive thing for ever *assumed.*

"Finally, tired of running around in a circle, I began looking about me for a *standard* by which to judge all things. It was clear to me that if I were to make any real advancement I must have a criterion. I was a long while seeing this truth, but eventually my environment showed it to me.

"But where was the standard? In art? Obviously not. In science? No; scientists ignored the soul, the 'life' of man; concerning themselves with his body, alone, and his environment. In religion? If so, in *what* religion? There were many of them, each claiming to be the 'right' one, and rejecting the claims of others.

"Again I came to the limits of my mental resources. I felt that the standard I sought must be a moral not a material standard; it must concern the soul, the thinking, creating part of man, for it was that, not brute muscle or mere intelligence, that drove him onward in his course. But my mind seemed incapable of locating this standard: and for

a long time I proclaimed myself an Agnostic. I declared that no man *knew* anything; that all his theories were groundless assumptions.

"But, my friend, I was not satisfied. I *felt* a potentiality within me that cried for intelligent *action*. Yet I could not bring myself to pray. Like you, I considered prayer an hypocrisy.

"Well, this was my state of mind when the great conviction of my life came to me. It happened one Sunday morning in church, while my father was preaching.

"His subject was 'Godly service,' and as I sat there listening to him a great mist rolled away from before my eyes. I saw the human family from the beginning, it seemed; ever striving for a Something which they did not comprehend but yearned for nevertheless. Their hands were outstretched toward the skies and they all seemed to be gazing upward. But as I looked closer I found my mistake. The outstretched hands and the staring eyes had for their object the material possessions of this mean earth. I saw greed, confusion, hatred, murder,—endless strife.

"And then a Figure arose whom my soul recognized as the Savior of Men. He walked amid the fighting multitude, crying peace, lifting up those that

fell in the strife, sacrificing his own life in the service of his fellow creatures.

"It was enough. I had found my standard: it was *Christlike service.* Nothing else counted; nothing else mattered.

"I reviewed my father's own life. It had been one of self-abnegation, of love for his fellow men and service toward them. His eyes were ever turned away from the material things. He seemed to see only human need and human woes; and with all his great soul strove to fulfill the one and ameliorate the other.

"I went home from church to my room and prayed to God for courage and strength. I prayed for faith, too, my friend! And do you know why? My brain told me it was an illogical act, according to human standards. But had I not *renounced* these standards and chosen the divine? Yes: and herein was my regeneration, my salvation. I realized that the obstruction to faith had been my own selfishness. In my egotism I had been blind: but in his mercy God opened my eyes.

"The secret, Brother Bosten, lies in *humility.* This is my message to you! the one I have longed to impart. The message that Jesus Christ brought to the world; the plan of salvation, whereby all men may rise to a nobler status of life. They may go their

human ways here, mighty in their own conceit; but when this mortal life is done and they face the Truth beyond, the realization of failure will be bound to come. And while the Scriptures, in their fullness, as I understand them, do not point to any such illogical hell as you and I have heard preached; nevertheless I believe they make it clear that men shall 'reap what they have sown.' This ought to be a sufficiently illuminating intimation to the sincere, intelligent soul."

The Kansan's attitude invited further speech.

"And let me say, my brother," the speaker finished, "that in this fact of reaping what is sown, of reward according to works, lies, as I view it, the principle of true human progress. There is no true evolution not comprehended in the gospel of Christ. The trouble with your earthly systems is that they ignore the moral, the spiritual, the godly consideration. They are, in fact, but human imitations of the divine.

"Geologists and biologists may dig and delve throughout all time; but unless the alleged facts they uncover correspond with Truth—which never ignores spiritual obligations—they are worthless for the guidance of mankind. They are not facts at all, but vain and harmful theories."

As was his habit, Mr. Stern came to an abrupt conclusion.

But the agnostic did not seem to realize that a conclusion had been reached. He sat submerged in thought. His companion, however, did not take advantage of the silence to continue speaking. Instead, he picked up a magazine on mechanics (electricity being one of his hobbies) and was soon lost in it.

This move, Peter knew, was not a tactical one. It was perfectly in harmony with Stern's nature to present a matter as forcefully as possible and leave it at that. Nor could any method of argument have carried more weight with the Kansan.

Stern had done what few eminent theologians ever do: given a questioner credit for possessing common intelligence. He had placed the free-thinking writer on equal spiritual and intellectual terms with himself, then presented his case without the usual assumptions and admonitions.

The Kansan once again reviewed his life experiences, recalling the theories and practices of such individuals as the Ladner editor; applying Stern's test of truth to things of earth, including men and their doings: and there came to his soul a partial conviction that at last he had encountered something irrefutable, strong and sure.

Here, it seemed, was a dream that was logical! A

dream incomprehensible to the "carnal man"; intelligible only to the soul that had learned, through suffering, to crave what was above earth.

Peter imagined the whole world accepting this "plan of salvation." Such a thing was not inconceivable, though highly improbable. He saw all the mean types of men submitting to it; forgetting their selfish quests and going in search of salvation. He saw them bend the knee, in humility, before a Power they yearned to comprehend; not that they might flatter and coax him, but that they might *learn* of him.

Here was the logical reason for prayer. It subjected the carnal mind to spiritual law. The supplicant himself profited by the submission of his desires to the divine—not the God he supplicated.

Peter realized that his own reasoning had been at fault. And why? Because it was the outcome of selfish thought. His mind had been working against the Mind of the Universe.

It all seemed perfectly clear to him now. In spite of his sincerity of purpose he had been misguided by his Ego.

Sincerity. He had once considered it the touchstone to honesty and truth. Ah, and so it was! But how to define "sincerity"? There were various brands, only one of which was genuine. To avail

anything, sincerity must correspond with Truth. The zeal of the heathen mother who cast her infant into the flames—was there anything beautiful, ennobling about it? According to earthly standards it might be considered "heroic," even "noble." But were not "earthly standards" the strongest factors in retarding true human evolution? Undoubtedly. What the world needed was the standard of the Figure in White, who "went about doing good." He, in very truth, was the "way and the life." In Him lay the explanation of all things.

Even as the thought entered his brain, Peter realized that he had never disposed of the "Man Christ Jesus" to his own satisfaction. This being had always haunted him in his most solemn moments. . . .

Whence had come that vision of Madison Square Garden? Had it been sent to him from heaven for his guidance? If so, how was it he had been able to throw it off his mind? And why did not such visions come to all soul-strivers? There must be countless honest, thirsting mortals on earth.

How about the Buddhists and Mohammedans and their yearnings after the truth? How about their leaders, indeed—men who had performed great deeds and blessed millions of lives? Why had not Christ, if he were the Son of the only true and living God, appeared to them as well as the Jews?

What of all this religious strife? Stern's church was not the only one claiming to represent Christ. If his were in reality the true one, what about the others? Christianity as a whole was narrow enough: it excluded billions of "heathen." But how about this one little phase of Christianity, which excluded all but a hundred thousand souls?

Peter put the question up to his companion, impulsively.

" 'Strait is the gate and narrow is the way and few there be that find it,' " quoted the latter. "Did not the Master himself have but few followers?"

"Yes,—according to the Bible he did. But why? How do you account for it? Does it sound reasonable, in the light of his great claims? Why should he confine his services to a mere handful of people?"

Mr. Stern smiled, with the same sympathetic light in his eyes that Peter had seen in Freely's, that day at the New Jersey reunion; and the Kansan was conscious of resenting it, now as then.

"Human reason can not fathom divine mysteries," came the reply. "Faith is not knowledge. 'Now we see through a glass darkly,' but in the Beyond we 'shall see face to face.' We must believe, first of all. There is no substitute for faith, my friend."

Peter did not reply. Stern's answer chilled him. The enthusiasm that had accompanied the Presi-

dent's personal testimony and immediately followed it, was fast disappearing in the skeptic's heart; and pouring in upon him came the old flood of doubts.

At last, his head bursting and his soul sick of the struggle, Peter faced his companion with a strange light in his eyes and cried:

"There is only one hell and that is Ignorance! I would gladly writhe in the bottomless pit, condemned to a term of diabolical torment, if only I *knew* that when my suffering had an end I should find *knowledge.*"

With that the Kansan abruptly left his friend's presence and persuaded the porter to make him up a berth.

Doubling his usual portion of asperin he lay down to sleep and determinedly closed his mind against thought; the while President Stern prayed earnestly in his seat.

Two days later, at the same hour, Noel Crayne and his wife sat talking in the kitchen of their little Iowa home.

"I don't think there's any use of inviting anyone, dear," the Missourian was saying, "until he's finished his book. You know what a state of mind he is in—or do you, I wonder?"

"Yes, I think I understand him fairly well, Noel.

Poor Peter is an artist, by nature, so why *shouldn't* I understand him?"

He smiled in recognition of the complimentary inference.

"That's right, I guess. He works like a madman. Do you know, Jessie, I fancy he is taking something."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, he is not himself. He is not the Peter I knew of old. His moods are irritable, his mind is distraught, and his eyes seem to be gazing afar off all the time."

The Missourian's voice was not quite steady. Jessie moved over toward him and patted his cheek.

"You mustn't worry about it, Noel. This spasm will pass. Tell me, how long do you think it will take him to complete the story?"

"It's hard to say, dear. But judging by the way he has started off I should say not long. It's a question in my mind whether his nerves will stand it. Why, as you know, he scarcely eats anything. If it were not for the coffee it would be almost impossible to coax him down to the table at all.

"It all seems so strange to me," he went on, pensively. "His coming here as Milton's secretary so unexpectedly; asking for a two weeks' holiday presumably to rest up, and then going desperately to work like this."

"Maybe," she ventured, "he wants to get it done before Conference."

"Before Conference?" said Noel. "Why, Jessie, at the rate he's going it won't take him two weeks. He's turning out first-class copy at the rate of a thousand words an hour. He's actually got three chapters finished since yesterday morning. On the basis of the average novel, the thing will only take him about seventy or eighty hours. But I can't conceive of his keeping up this pace for a solid week. However the approach of conference may have some bearing on his haste, as you suggest. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that he even figures on *publication* before April the first."

Jessie shook her head skeptically.

"That would be an unheard-of feat in novel publishing—at least for our Banner Office. I presume he will give them first chance with the manuscript?"

"The Banner" plant was the pride of Le Bois.

"Oh, yes. He is writing it expressly for them, I think. You know, dear, if I really made up my mind to boss him I could bring him, to some extent, out of his daze. Once or twice to-day I interrupted him with malice aforethought, Muse or no Muse; but, do you know, I half regretted it when he looked at me with those questioning eyes of his, as though won-

dering why I interfered, begging me to leave him alone just for a little while."

The bishop's niece played with a stray wisp of black hair.

"It's queer," she observed, philosophically, "but you men of genius never seem to understand each other. It takes a practical old thing like me to do it, after all. Now, Noel, like a good boy just forget Peter and leave him alone. The harder he works the sooner he will be done. I'll personally see that he doesn't starve. By the way, did you get a glimpse of the part he has already finished?"

Noel laughed, in his rumbling bass, under the spell of his young wife's soothing words.

"Is it feminine curiosity?" he asked, "or literary interest?"

"A little of both," she answered, truthfully.

"Then, since you're so honest, I'll tell you. When he wasn't paying any attention whatever to me, I picked up the first sheet of his manuscript and read it; and while I could not tell from that just how he would treat his subject, or, in fact, exactly what the subject was, I recognized a certain spirit, which, if he carries it through, will make the story strong. Probably you're right in urging me to leave him alone, dear. But it's hard to see dear old Peter killing himself by inches."

A pinch punished him for this.

"Don't you go falling in love with him again," she warned. "He used to take you away from me more than I liked, once upon a time—although I never said anything. But now I claim the major part."

The Missourian rebuked her in looks if not in words for this remark; but neglected to make a confession involving stray affections, which he had often been on the verge of making, but could never quite seem to find a strong enough motive for so doing. The old adage about ignorance and bliss invariably carried weight with him while wavering over this matter. Yet, he knew he would tell her, sometime.

"It's rather phenomenal, when you think of it," Jessie observed, smoothing down the wisp of hair she had been twisting; "this sudden impulse of Peter's to write a novel along the lines of our faith. How do you explain it, Noel?"

"I can't, dear. There is no explaining Peter, in anything he does, as a rule. Possibly he just sees a theme capable of original, forceful treatment. It may be the artistic faculty, alone. Then again, God's Spirit may be at work. It is hard to say. We are all speculators, aren't we, when it comes down to the deeper meanings of life?"

"We would be," she corrected, "if it were not for the enlightenment of the gospel."

"Of course," he returned. And smilingly,—"You shouldn't make a skeptic of me on such small provocation. I was thinking from a purely human point of view when I spoke."

"I understand—silly! Do you know, I believe I have it. He didn't decide to take a vacation until the night before last, did he?"

Noel nodded in agreement.

"And he gossiped with us all the afternoon he arrived, didn't he?"

"Go on," said the Missourian, "I'll agree to everything you say—to save time."

"Thank you. Well, he talked quite like his old self for a while after arriving. His gaze was focused on us and the room at first. But gradually, as we related the changes that had taken place in five years: your marriage and appointment as assistant pastor to the Le Bois Branch; the advancement made in college and the church by Allan Leader; the great change in Adele Cressy, and her growing attachment for Allan: he seemed to lose himself in a sort of dream. I believe, Noel, that he was then beginning to conceive this story he has so impulsively begun."

She looked into the Missourian's eyes for encouragement, and must have found it, for she continued:

"He was distraught at supper, and afterwards he

went over to where Brother Stern is staying and secured his leave of absence from duty. Then, bright and early next morning—yesterday, he set to work. . . . Listen, you can hear the tapping of his typewriter at this moment."

"Yes," said Noel, after a silence, "the dear old fellow is killing himself."

Another pause followed this remark, after which Jessie continued to perplex her already puzzled husband.

"How do you account for his indifference to mention of Helen Dyke's name? When I hinted that she was still unmarried he only lapsed a little further into his dream."

"Which," added the Missourian thoughtfully, "may mean far more than you or I can guess."

CHAPTER XIX

"THE WAY OF FAITH"

THE MANAGER of *The Banner of Truth,* whom everyone knew as such an active man, sat dreaming at his desk. How long he would have continued to ignore the heap of papers before him, had he not been interrupted by the entrance of a friend, even the office boy could not have conjectured.

"Hello, Brother Stern," he greeted, coming out of his musing. "How are you this morning?"

It was Adam, not Milton Stern who had come in.

"Fine, thank you, Brother Carr. I just dropped in to learn something about the religious romance which rumor says lies here in this office. I understand Noel Crayne's friend, Bosten, wrote it?"

"Yes. Do you know him personally?"

"No. I met him just the other day, but we had no opportunity of getting acquainted. Poor chap is pretty sick this morning, I understand. It seems he finished his book in ten days, revisions and all; which, if it's a fact, doubtless explains the strong nervous reaction he's having."

Mr. Carr stroked his sandy Vandyke.

"I can't get over it, myself, Adam. If the thing were void of thought, lacked soul and showed signs

of merely mechanical construction, I might understand it. But there is real life in the story; real soul-yearnings. From the standpoint of cultured writings, of course, it is not 'literature.' But, to me, it is something more. It portrays life truthfully, and these mortal thoughts passionately."

Adam Stern's countenance brightened.

"This is good news, Alex. Especially will it be so to Noel. Since the completion of the story it's *he* that's been in suspense. The author himself is entirely nonchalant. He refuses to even talk about it. All he wants to do is sleep and rest."

The manager pressed a buzzer, and the office boy, a typical member of his craft, entered.

"Dicky, will you ask the foreman to step here, please?"

After transferring his gum from one locality, within his capacious mouth, to another and grinning in acknowledgment of the visitor's smile, "Dicky" saw fit to obey.

"Burton," asked Carr, when the printer stood before him, "are both of the linotypes loaded up?"

"No, sir. I think not."

"How long would it take you to set up about ninety galleys of good typewritten copy, in ten-point double leaded—by speeding up the men and working both machines?"

The printer scratched his head.

"I reckon about twenty-four hours, Mr. Carr."

"Very well. Clear for action right away. I'll have you some of the manuscript in a few minutes." Turning to Stern. "My idea, Adam, is to make up about a hundred dummies, of uncorrected proof if necessary, and distribute them around at Conference time. In this way I can ascertain the selling possibilities of the book and the size of the edition I ought to undertake."

"Besides," smiled the other, "getting a lot of fun out of the thing."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, hearing the verdicts of various minds. Of course, I haven't read the story yet; but if it deals with church people and ideals, we are not guessing when we forecast philosophical, if not gladiatorial, combats."

They laughed together, perhaps not so much over the remark, as over memories of many a Conference business session.

"What do you say," asked Stern, "if I take a day off, myself, and read the thing—sit right down here and go through each chapter before the linotypist gets it?"

"Good idea!" cried Carr, enthusiastically. "You'll probably think it arbitrary of me not to have sug-

gested such a thing myself? But, you see, there will be opportunity for revising the story later on, anyway; and I certainly did not intend ignoring either you or Milton."

But already Adam Stern was oblivious of his surroundings. He seemed not to hear the manager's remark. With his hat on the back of his head and his chair leaning against the wall, he was sinking into the story.

Six hours later the manager came in from an exceptionally late lunch and found his friend and brother still reading The Way of Faith.

"What," he said, "haven't you eaten anything, Adam?"

The reader shook his head, drew a hand across his eyes, yawned and replied:

"Your carnal mind shocks me, Alex. I'll go out presently."

However, he remained there two hours after that —until he had finished the manuscript. Then he rose, yawned again and stretched himself. Carr glanced at him with a humorous glint in his eye.

"If I'd stopped to reflect that you were an author and poet yourself," he remarked, "dipped in the flame like the rest of them, I might have ordered an easy chair sent up here. . . . But come, I'm anxious to

have your opinion: please don't keep me in suspense like this."

Mr. Stern sat down again, and faced the manager.

"I can say this much, Brother Carr: The story is about you and me, and therefore it can not fail to interest *us*. I took upon myself the soul of the Agnostic character as I proceeded. Most of us know him, I guess, down in our being. Yes, I liked it. Nothing quite like it has been written, so far as I know. Members of the church will read it, undoubtedly. But whether you will make money out of it or not is a different matter. Only sincere minds will take to it. It is not a story for what we call 'summer reading.' You are doing the wise thing, I think, in making up these dummies.

"I like it best, I believe, because it strengthens one in the conviction that after all the influence of a man's daily life is the big factor in advertising Jesus Christ. We may preach ourselves hoarse and cry 'Faith' until our hearers are deaf; but unless we show what the gospel has done in our own lives, we accomplish nothing, we degrade our message, ourselves and our Maker.

"This skeptic-writer has accomplished a work worth while; yes, I feel sure he has. It may not meet with the approval of everybody; but it meets with my approval at least. There is a breadth of vision in

it, just as there is a depth of ignorance, and the contrast proves humanly, nay spiritually, interesting."

Carr smiled, pleased.

"What do you think," he asked, guiltily, "of the words he puts into your own mouth?"

"Mine?"

"Yes; don't you recognize yourself in the story?"

Stern smiled peculiarly.

"My dear sir," he answered, "for a publisher your literary perception is most inartistic. If you can go literalizing the characters and situations of Mr. Bosten's story like this, right on the start—you, the official acceptor of the story,—I fear to reflect upon the possibilities of perversion elsewhere. Some guilty soul will find himself in the character of the villain, and go in search of the author with a club."

Carr laughed to himself, as he wrote a memo and listened to his friend's evasion.

"I am thinking," he observed, pausing between phrases to give some attention to his work, "that one of the benefits accruing from the publication of this story will be, as you have hinted, that of suggesting the acquisition of a little artistic as well as spiritual understanding. Sometimes, I'm afraid, our people get the two confused."

"Very true," returned Stern. "I had the same thought when I spoke, but neglected to phrase it.

We should be very diffident in the presence of a publisher, anyway."

Carr looked up comically.

"With that piece of sarcasm I suppose you'll betake yourself off?"

"Before it's reciprocated, Alex, I reckon I'd better." He walked toward the door but there he turned and remarked: "I'll see that your remains are given the proper attention, after the Conference gets through with your dummies."

A low but hearty laugh reechoed from without, a moment later; but the manager's ears being filled with a similar sound of his own, he was scarcely aware of it.

"Brother President!"

"Brother Fraser."

"I rise to move that the book entitled The Way of Faith, samples of which have been distributed among many of us here, be recommended for publication by this Conference and that the Banner manager be empowered to preface such indorsation in the book itself."

"Brother President, I second the motion!" cried another—Murdoch, the Scotch-Canadian, no less.

And then the storm began.

It was the third business session of the Conference.

Several missionaries tried to talk simultaneously, but they were drowned out by the President's gavel; and Roland Fraser obtained the floor.

"My reasons for making the motion I have made, Mr. President and brothers and sisters, are these: I have read the book in question and believe it is of such a nature as to interest thinking people. Those who read it will, I believe, be struck with the reality of its characters and psychological situations; and they will, to say the least, be curious to know something of the church about which it tells. I am a believer in the right kind of advertising; and this story, it seems to me, is that kind. It is my opinion that if every sincere believer in God could appreciate the breadth of our teachings and feel the spirit that prompts us, there would be a great influx into the church of Christ.

"The story truly represents the highest ideals of human, nay spiritual life; by combining art with integrity the author has painted a picture which all of us may do well to study, and which I can not, myself, help but admire. I heartily indorse the publication of The Way of Faith."

"Brother President!"

"Yes, Brother Gibson?"

"I want to express myself as unfavorable to the

book in question." The speaker was obviously not a missionary. He wore a light-tweed suit, a bright tie decorated with a diamond pin, and other articles of dress indicative of prosperous business life. "In the first place this story has been written by a nonmember and a nonbeliever in God. I have read one of the dummies and have taken the trouble to find out something about the author. He is, I am sorry to say, sick in bed at this moment; but I understand he has rejected the gospel for years, and therefore I can not believe he has been guided by the Spirit in his work. It seems to me this church should confine itself to spiritual publications. If we want fiction, let us pick up a volume of Charles Dickens, who was the highest exponent of purely humanitarian ideals. Moreover, I believe The Way of Faith hits at certain individuals in this church who are doing their best. Because a man succeeds in business he must not be considered dishonest and hypocritical. There is a certain member of this church, a friend of mine in the East, whom I believe has been dealt with too severely; and let me say frankly that I read in this story we are discussing a misrepresentation of that very man.

"I want to see this motion defeated. The book is not literature. It is clumsily written, and it ends absurdly. The best modern writers are in favor of

the happy ending, and, personally, I can not tolerate a story that terminates otherwise. Let me urge my brothers and sisters to vote against the publication of a novel that is not a novel, and a sermon from an infidel."

At least twenty fiery-eyed men, most of them in missionary garb, jumped to their feet at the word "Infidel." A broad grin overspread President Stern's face, as he endeavored to differentiate the many "Brother Presidents" hurled at him.

"I think," he said, "I am obliged to recognize Brother Murdoch."

The Scotch-Canadian acknowledged his gratitude with a bow, and turning toward the last speaker, began:

"The worthy brother's chief objection seems to be that there is not a happy ending to the story. At least, I take it that that is the chief stumblingblock to him. He would taste sugar under his tongue at the finish; hear the echo of the old refrain, 'Je vous aime'; 'Ich liebe dich'; and so on. But let me submit, brothers and sisters, that the true novelist does not deceive his readers. Dickens was a great writer, but he threw his magic web over many stern realities which we would do well to face and endeavor to reform. For instance, he treated the matter of in-

temperance lightly, throwing a glamor around the tippler's life.

"Our fellow countryman here who lies sick as a result of his labor, Brother Bosten—I call him 'Brother' unhesitatingly, for though he may not have joined the church and may not see as we do, I consider him a sincere and noble character. Whatever his lot may be Hereafter; whatever his actions may be during the remainder of his life on earth, indeed: I consider that he has accomplished a work that will last; one that will bring forth good fruits. Does my worthy brother over here suppose that good can come only out of Zion? Does he suppose that only those of us who have a certain brand of faith, can do the world's and God's work? I speak of different 'brands of faith,' because that is exactly what I mean. In this matter of divine realization many of us deceive ourselves. Our claims, our pretentions are belied by our deeds.

"But back to the happy ending. I thank the author from the bottom of my heart for the honest manner in which he brought about his climax. There was no self-deception in it; there were no false lights. He did not make his Agnostic accept faith on the impulse, for the sake of dramatic effect. Not being able to conceive of the miraculous, he left miracles

alone. For this I admire him. Few of us would have been so honest-minded.

"Like my worthy brother here, I regret that the leading character of the story was not converted to faith in God. But I could not help but feel that the author made him do the *natural* thing. His story, after all, is about men—not angels. Some of us win in this soul-striving of ours and others lose. But whether or not the losers shall be behind us, in the great evolution, a thousand years from now, is a problem you and I can not solve.

"Reference has been made to an individual, formerly a church member, about whom I happen to know considerable. I believe, like the last speaker, that he is caricatured in the story. And so he ought to be. Any man who robs widows and orphans as he did, and covers up his sins with a cloak of hypocrisy, deserves not only excummunication from the church, but the contempt of an honest-minded writer like Brother Bosten. It is individuals like this villain in Bosten's story, who stand in the way of Christ's gospel. They ought to be swept aside, once their guilt is established; for the best of us are impediment enough. Too many of us are stumbling-blocks to seekers after truth.

"And let me express it as my unofficial opinion, brothers and sisters, that in the great beyond you

and I will receive many a surprise. If I am faithful enough to gain admittance into the holy city; and should I meet the Agnostic hero of the story under discussion, upon the streets of gold, my surprise would be as small as my joy would be great. For I love and have hope for an honest heart, be it Christian or 'heathen.'

"The Way of Faith, it seems to me, fills a need we have long felt in the literary circles of this church. There is romance and passion in our religion, my friends. The Christian we admire is not an insane hermit, whose life consists of barbaric penance and selfish delusions; but a throbbing, suffering, rejoicing, striving being, spurred by faith, restrained by reason, humbled by uncertainty. Such a character our fellow thinker and striver has created. That he has not 'converted' him, as we call it, is *his* business.

"Bosten's Agnostic is typical to me of the honorable man of the earth. We preach the gospel to him and make him our friend at once; but, for some reason, he never comes into the church. Why? You or I can not answer the question, so why should we demand an answer of Peter Bosten? The nearest we can come to the solution of this psychologic problem, is to say that we believe in different 'rewards' Hereafter. 'In my Father's house are many man-

sions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you.' We are apportioned, in the mercy of God, a reward according to our works, after death. What those works are, he, himself, must determine. It is not for you or me, my friend, to sit in judgment upon a fellow creature.

"Let me therefore beg of the Conference to sanction this story under discussion. It has got heart and soul in it. The characters are those we know; the strivings are ours too; and as for the ending—it is, as it should be, a mystery to mortal mind. This thing we call Life, brothers and sisters, is too elastic a force to be hemmed in by prejudices. Let us be more liberal-minded in the direction of truth. Christ Jesus is too big for us yet; we must stretch out, in thought and action, if we would associate with him.

"I do not ask you to surrender your faith in the 'straight and narrow way' which few shall find here on earth. Retain it, by all means; and do your best to prove its validity in your daily life. But in the realm of Thought, where the mind of man honestly interrogates the Mind of the Universe, I beg of you to be liberal, charitable.

"We do not know it all—indeed, we never shall. Truth is progressive. A little of it can be picked up every day—if we are sufficiently humble.

"Indorsation of this book means nothing more nor

less than the approbation of truth-seeking. Publication of it by our Banner Office, here in Le Bois, does not commit us to an approval of all the ideas advanced—or of any of them, for that matter. It merely means that we recommend it for intelligent perusal. The day of pontifical cursings and blessings, you know, is about over."

Contrary to custom, applause greeted this speaker's remarks. Discussion, however, did not stop here. It continued (Carr said it "raged") for another hour.

The last speaker was President Stern himself. He gave the chair to his cousin, Adam, and shaking his mighty shoulders like a lion preparing to spring, bounded into the arena with set jaws and blazing eyes.

It was an uncommon procedure for him. Usually he allowed the Conference to fight its own battles. Even now he apologized for "inflicting himself upon them," as he expressed it; but his apology and the reason for it were forgotten in the virile eloquence that followed.

He referred back to Murdoch's argument, and reminded some of the controversialists present that they were losing themselves in a maze of bigotry.

"The 'fullness of the gospel' means nothing as a phrase," he said. "We might juggle the words for

ever without making any intellectual or spiritual headway. What we want is a *fullness of comprehension.*

"As a former speaker has said, 'Truth is progressive.' The gospel of Christ undoubtedly comprehends all truth; but then who fully comprehends this *gospel?* It unfolds to us as we advance, my friends; and we can only advance by sincerely applying ourselves to a search for knowledge and right. The faculties we are endowed with must be used to the full extent: not until then are we entitled to the guidance of Christ's Spirit. If we are mentally lazy, and willfully ignorant; wedded to tradition and vulgar lovers of the superstitious, the mystical; we can not expect to enjoy spiritual understanding—were we baptized a thousand times!"

At this point of the President's remarks, one of the ushers handed a dark-eyed young woman, seated at a secretary's desk beneath the rostrum, a note; and without a moment's delay she followed him out of the auditorium.

CHAPTER XX

A DYING AGNOSTIC

THERE is sadness in the breeze and sunshine of an early-spring afternoon. Noel Crayne felt it, now, as he had never done before.

After rising suddenly, like one in a trance, and begging his friend to send for Helen Dyke at once, Peter had lain back exhausted and fallen into a doze again.

Noel watched the sunbeams playing upon the Kansan's hair; and resting his cheek against the foot of the cot, allowed his tears to flow unchecked.

Why not?—there was no one around. Only God looked on; and he knew the love and sorrow that had distilled these tears.

Presently, however, the Missourian started from his reverie, hurriedly wiped his face with a handkerchief, and answered a rap on the door.

"Come in, Helen," he said, quietly. "I think Peter will be awake in a moment."

She did not reply. It was her first glimpse of the Kansan in more than five years.

There was a long silence, during which an occasional heavy sigh escaped the sleeper; but by and by Helen spoke.

"Did he really send for me, Noel?"

"Yes, Helen, he did; and there was no mistaking his tone. He will wake, in a moment—see, he's growing restless again."

A light groan was followed by a nervous shiver, and Peter opened his eyes.

He did not seem surprised that Helen should be sitting there. His gaze rested upon her a moment, then he reached out his hand and pressed hers.

Noel made a plausible excuse, seeing that Peter seemed to be so normal, and left them alone.

"Helen," said the Kansan, his voice steadier than it had been earlier in the afternoon, "I didn't send for you until I had to. There is a stubborn devil in me somewhere that has always made my life more or less miserable." A pause. "You hurt me so much once that I thought I'd never be able to get over it. But as I look at you, now, and see the same sweet face as of old, I know that my love has never really died."

She knelt beside his bed, at this, and hid her face.

"I feel that I have come to the end of it all," he went on. "No, no," he added, in answer to a reproachful movement; "it isn't imagination, dear. I can feel the damp mists of Eternity against my forehead.

"Do you know, Helen, I have always fancied that

I should never know life's great joys. They have ever seemed intangible to me—like the notes of a song or the tints of sunset. I often think that my soul must have been shaped differently from the average. Perhaps it lacks something."

"Peter," she whispered, "I'm afraid you will tire yourself out talking like this. Don't you think you had better just lie still and let me massage your throbbing temples?"

"No," he answered, with a shade of unnatural impatience, "I must tell you what's on my mind. I can't rest until I do."

As a means of forcing him to obey her, however, Helen resolved to do the talking herself; and began to speak of the Conference debate over his book, in the hope of interesting him.

He listened while she spoke of President Stern, but lost interest at mention of the others.

"Whether they publish it or not, he interrupted, "it's not much good. You know, I've been thinking, Helen—it's *you* people who are the doers and I who am the preacher.

"When it comes down to the fine thing, there's not much in words. I think it was Mr. Stern's companionship that made me feel this so keenly. He almost had me converted, I believe. But when I came back here and found so many changes,—Noel mar-

ried, Leader reformed, even Adele Cressy interested in church work, the romance of the whole thing got hold of me and I just had to write it up.

"This writing habit is characteristic of my nature, I'm afraid. There is something insincere about it. Yes, that's it—insincerity. That's the trouble *you* always found with me, wasn't it? Own up, Helen?"

She begged, with wet eyes, that he would not go on like this; but he only smiled, though not indifferently.

"It's the *truth* I'm trying to get at, Helen dear. I know that I am facing Eternity. There is no doubt about it in my mind. And while I have no fear (I can laugh at hell fire and all that heathen superstition), yet I want to pass over on the other side with as clear an understanding as possible.

"Since associating with Stern I've come to the conclusion that my life has been spent selfishly. Why, during all my years of struggling to be a writer and a reformer, it never entered my head that I was performing no real service, making no real sacrifice, in the cause of my fellow men. I went on thinking of myself and working for myself. If I felt the yearning, which every true man ought to feel, to help somebody, do some one good, I went to my typewriter and wrote an article about it—after which I felt that the obligation had been discharged! This,

Helen, is the trouble with artists. Their work may be entertaining or even uplifting, but in the final analysis it is work performed for themselves. They derive the most benefit and pleasure from it."

His mind was working with abnormal energy again. Helen urged him to lie still, but in vain.

"You might as well let the candle burn out now as later," he told her; and although a tear appeared in his own eye at sight of her suffering, he went on, as though driven by a force he could not control.

"You, dear, and the rest of you may have been right after all when you told me, in words or actions, that the obstacle to faith in God with me was selfishness. Sometimes I feel convinced of the fact, as I lie here reviewing the past. Yet, at other times, I lose my way in the fogs of ignorance and doubt. Ah, dear, it's weary work!

"But, at any rate," he continued, in a feverish renewal of vim, "an assumption of faith now would be sheer hypocrisy. The kind of faith I should want is the kind Stern has: the active working kind. It is only of use in life—no good in death. I think I almost prayed for it the night I began my story here in this room, a few weeks ago. I felt that in order to possess it I must perform in a few days what I had neglected to perform in five or six years. But that's impossible, of course. A dying man can not

assume the Christ kind of faith. "He hasn't *time* to experience it,—let alone test it."

"How about repentance, Peter?" Helen asked, regretting the question immediately.

"You're still a true believer, aren't you?" he smiled. "But girl, if you knew how I have striven and suffered you would better appreciate my state of mind. I might even now ask to be taken out of here and baptized for the remission of my sins. It would be easy to do that, Helen,—can you understand? But my brain will not permit of it; my intellect rebels. I can not conceive of the use of it."

"But you might be raised up, Peter," she returned, her eyes lighting up with the fires of faith,—"as God's children have often been, by his mercy."

The Agnostic shook his head.

"No, Helen. If faith comes to me it must come through my reason, not through my desires. I can not bring myself to do an irrational act. Now that I am dying I should be a coward to act inconsistently with my life. Deathbed repentance is disgusting to my intelligence. It is a man's life that must determine his estate hereafter—not the manner of his death.

"My works here on earth have not been many, I fear. And so, when I go hence, I shall find myself in the primary grade, no doubt. But so be it, dear.

I shall try to learn my lessons faithfully, and if I fail beyond, as I seem to have failed here, there will be other grades, on and on—"

"But Peter," she interrupted, "supposing you were raised up now and lived to be an old man? Think of the useful years there might be before you!"

He shook his head again, sadly; his face became whiter, and he leaned back upon the pillow.

"I am leaving earth, Helen. There will be no more human longing for me after to-day. This mortal faith of yours is beyond me, as are all other earthly things. I can not make—myself—clearer."

He sighed, waited a moment for breath, and proceeded:

"We are saying good-by for a longer period, this time, dear. I don't feel as though we were parting for ever, though—isn't that strange? . . .

"Good-by, Helen. . . . Forgive me. . . . God forgive me,—and—give—me—."

The last word was a whisper, and would have been inaudible to her had she not drawn near to him as he uttered it—

"Knowledge!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEW PETER

OUTSIDE the stone church, where Peter Bosten's wavering footsteps had first halted, God's glorious sunshine poured down in cleansing beams. The flowers in the adjoining gardens spoke of midsummer, that season of the year when Nature's beauty most successfully defies mortal appreciation, as her works defy human understanding.

The peace of Sabbath seemed to fill even the hearts of the sparrows upon the eaves. They peeped and twittered, but did not fly noisily about. In their insignificant way, they seemed to be musing over life; wondering if it were not, indeed, more than food and shelter, flights and chatterings.

But if the spirit of reflection and quietude reigned without, a more solemn influence held sway within the walls. A weary wanderer halting by the open door of the basement, might well have asked himself if here were rest and comfort of soul at last.

Solemnly, yet not mournfully, swelled the notes of a hymn that has touched many a world-sick heart:

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th' encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on.

Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene;
One step enough for me."

But now a voice is speaking, and its notes are familiar to us. Let us not pause outside the door, stealing the stray joys that come to us, but go in and partake of them fully.

It is the young people's early-morning prayer service and a tall, slim man is speaking. He can scarcely be over thirty, though the lines of thought are stamped upon his face.

His large, blue eyes are downcast at first, but presently he raises them and gazes upon the presiding officer of the meeting—the Missourian, no less.

"Brothers and sisters, although it is impossible for me to express the thoughts and emotions the hymn you have just sung stirs in me, I must bear my testimony to the mercy of God and the truth of his gospel, as best I can.

"Three months ago I lay sick of body and soul, longing to be rid of life, yet looking forward to the next world without hope or gladness. I could feel the very damp of death upon my cheeks, the mists were swallowing me up; and yet I could not yield this mortal mind to the Mind of God.

"I did not know it then, but I know now that I was

in Hell. My soul groped in darkness. I had reached the last dim boundary-line of reason, yet it seemed impossible for me to realize my condition. I cried for *knowledge,* until my voice died out and the light of my eyes faded. So far as I know I was dead.

"And then, dear brothers and sisters, the new life came. I can not explain it, any more than I can explain the sunlight that comes in a golden flood through these windows."

His voice shook and he was obliged to pause a moment. But no curious eyes were turned upon him. The pervading spirit of the place, a potentiality that made youths and maidens weep, prevented that.

"New understanding came to me. Indeed, it seemed that I had been endowed with a new soul.

"The first thing I remember, after the darkness, was the sound of a voice. It called my name. Then I saw and heard a loved one praying for me."

The figure sitting beside him sobbed, quietly; but no one seemed alarmed at this.

"After that I realized that my headaches and my dizziness were gone. They had disappeared with my old brain—the carnal brain that sought a human explanation of everything.

"It would take a lifetime, I believe, to adequately describe the mental and spiritual experiences I have had since then. They are almost beyond telling.

"So I shall content myself, dear friends, with assuring you that I am now happy for the first time in my life.

"This happiness is so full that I pray it may not continue uninterruptedly,—lest I become selfish again. I want to feel an occasional pang of my old soul-suffering, that I may be kept humble and faithful. This, I have no doubt, will be my portion, too; for I have a naturally restless mind. Yet it is the mind God gave me; and now that it is regenerated, I hope and believe that it will eventually submit to the eternal purposes of its Maker.

"This is the joyful assurance that has come to me of late. The old man has been laid in the grave, and the new man now rises to walk in newness of life.

"My heart is so full I could testify for ever to God's love and mercy; but, even in so good a work, must I use my reason. Not the old reason, however, —a thing of human dimensions; but the enlightened faculty that works in unison with faith.

"I can truly say with John Newman, the author of the hymn we have sung,—a man who surely must have suffered and been blessed in the same manner as I, myself,—'I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me.'

"The entire hymn tells my own story with marvelous accuracy.

"Ah, brothers and sisters, we can afford to do right if it results in such happiness as I have felt of late. The sacrifice is not half great enough on our part. The Almighty is too generous!

"Let me ask you to pray for me, though, in spite of my present joy. We are all uncertain mortals and can not afford to boast—even of our happiness."

With this remark, he sat down; and immediately a figure arose which always compelled attention in those Sunday-morning meetings.

It was Adele.

Although a stalwart man-of-battle sat beside her, one whom she had learned to love and whose tale of life was a viril romance to her; she found difficulty in saying a few simple words that would have meant absolutely nothing to—well, let us say the editor of the Ladner *Evening Globe.*

We close with the following picture.

A table underneath the trees on Milton Stern's front lawn. It is laden with Missourian luxuries, for a Kansas author has just paid a commission to a "divine" for placing a Canadian war manuscript.

The athletic preacher (but for the theatrical significance we should say "actor") sat at the head; a place of honor, no doubt, but also the point farthest removed from a tempting variety of cake and fruits;

on either side of him, his wife (who might be mistaken for a more mature Helen Dyke), and daughter. Beyond them, to the right, a lean, fair individual and a dark-eyed one; to the left, a person who insisted on sketching the company and was in danger of having his work spoiled by the nudging of a more practical person, who feared that he would forget to eat.

I hear Noel's bass rumble of a laugh, so, afflicted reader, I beg of you to excuse me. Let me go away with those happy tones ringing in my ears!

I leave you with the joyous company; warning you, however, that some one is liable to start a philosophical argument.

Indeed, to be perfectly frank, I withdraw myself on that very account; for I can not remain, in spite of the many temptations to neglect it, without endeavoring to record all that is said: and that would be too great a labor for a scribe who with aching head feverishly anticipates those sweet words, *The End.*

But as for yourself, I trust you will partake of Milton Stern's hospitality and attend to his company's conversation. It will not be trivial, I promise you, nor yet mournful. You will hear sentiments that come from the heart and have a vital bearing

upon life. You will feel, when you know them, that these men and women are worth while—because they are sincere.

THE END